



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Language development in the early school years: The importance of close relationships with teachers

Spilt, J.L.; Koomen, H.M.Y.; Harrison, L.J.

**DOI**

[10.1037/a0038540](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038540)

**Publication date**

2015

**Document Version**

Author accepted manuscript

**Published in**

Developmental Psychology

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., & Harrison, L. J. (2015). Language development in the early school years: The importance of close relationships with teachers. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(2), 185-196. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

*UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)*

Running head: CLOSENESS AND LANGUAGE

Language Development in the Early School Years:  
The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers

Jantine L. Spilt

KU Leuven, Division School Psychology and Child and Adolescent Development, Leuven, The Netherlands

Helma Y. M. Koomen

University of Amsterdam, Department of Child Development and Education, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Linda J. Harrison

Charles Sturt University, School of Teacher Education, Bathurst, Australia

This paper uses unit record data from Growing Up in Australia, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. The study is conducted in partnership between the Department of Social Services (DSS) (previously Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DSS, AIFS or the ABS.

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

## Abstract

This longitudinal study examined developmental links between closeness in teacher-child relationships and children's receptive language ability from the end of the preschool years into the early elementary years, while controlling for changes in peer interaction quality and child behavioral functioning. The sample included children and their parents and teachers ( $N = 4,983$ ) participating in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) at ages 4/5, 6/7, and 8/9 years (three waves). Teachers reported on levels of closeness in relationships with individual children. Independent assessments of receptive language were employed. Parents and teachers reported on peer interaction problems and child conduct problems. Results indicated reciprocal associations between close teacher-child relationships and receptive language development above and beyond associations with peer interaction quality and child behavioral functioning. However, the effects were only modest.

*Keywords:* teacher-child relationships, support, receptive language, transactional models

## Language Development in the Early School Years:

### The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers

Language is a critical factor in children's adjustment. Deficits in language development have been linked to social problems, conduct problems, and delinquency (Menting, Van Lier, & Koot, 2011; Moffitt, 1993; Nigg & Huang-Pollock, 2003). In addition, poor language skills, and in particular poor verbal comprehension or receptive language, at school entry are an indicator of low school readiness and a risk for subsequent academic problems (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004). From a prevention and intervention perspective, it is thus of primary importance to identify normative conditions and processes that contribute to language development during the early school years. Considering the time children spend in classrooms, teachers are proximal interaction and communication partners and unique sources for language input in children's daily lives (Dickinson & Porsche, 2011; Hoff, 2006; Pianta, 2006). Very few studies, however, have examined the possibility that children's language development is promoted in the context of a close teacher-child relationship, and none of these have examined reciprocal associations between closeness with teachers and receptive language development.

### **Close Relationships as a Context for Language Development**

Social constructivist perspectives (Leseman & De Jong, 1998) and social-interactionist theories of language acquisition (Chapman, 2000) consider language acquisition a fundamentally social process. In particular social interactionist theories highlight the importance of warm and affectionate relationships with communication partners (Chapman, 2000). Language, in particular its functional goal, is stimulated in the context of close dyadic relationships through

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

conversation. In this respect, Justice and colleagues (2008) cite Chapman saying that “frequent, relatively well-tuned affectively positive verbal interactions support rapid language acquisition” (Chapman, 2000, p.43). There is ample evidence for this position from research on parenting showing a unique contribution of maternal sensitivity and warmth to the language acquisition of young children, additional to the effect of cognitive stimulation (e.g., Lugo-Gil & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Raviv, Kessenich, & Morrison, 2004). Securely-attached children have more rewarding literacy interactions with mothers and receive more sensitive instruction and feedback from mothers, which explains individual differences in language development (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn, 1988; Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1997). In contrast, insecurely-attached children show less interest in reading, appear more occupied by feelings of anxiety, and were more distracted during literacy interactions. The affective dimensions of the mother-child relationship thus clearly seem to affect the quality of children’s language experiences. Likewise, the affective dimensions of the teacher-child relationship too have been hypothesized to contribute to children’s language development (Pianta, 2006).

Research on language development in the context of relationships with peers also highlights the importance of close relationships with communication partners (Pellegrini, Galda, & Flor, 1997; Pellegrini, Galda, Flor, Bartini, & Charak, 1997; Pellegrini, Melhuish, Jones, Trojanowska, & Gilden, 2000). Pellegrini and colleagues (1997, 2000) found that children expressed more emotional and sophisticated language in solving conflicts in their interactions with friends compared to non-friends.

### **Close Relationships with Teachers as a Context for Receptive Language Development**

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

Guided by an extended attachment perspective (Pianta, 1992; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012), relationships with teachers have been conceptualized as affective relationships that have similar (but not identical) functions to parent-child relationships. In particular the secure-base function of the teacher-child relationship is considered an important determinant of child development within the school context. Children who feel secure with teachers are more likely to have personalized conversations with teachers (Dickinson & Porche, 2011) and to be engaged in language learning activities (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008), both of which are believed to promote receptive language. In addition, drawing further parallels with parent-child relationship contributions to language learning, children with close teacher-child relationships are considered to be more likely to elicit high-quality instruction and feedback on language learning from teachers. Moreover, children who feel secure with their teachers are also more likely to profit from this higher-quality instruction and feedback (Crosnoe et al., 2010; Pianta, 2006).

Conversely, it can also be hypothesized that children with better receptive language skills develop closer relationships with teachers (Justice et al, 2008; Rudasill et al., 2006). Good receptive language skills are necessary for children to engage in more sophisticated and extended conversations, which promotes to the development of a personal and close relationship. Poor receptive language abilities, on the other hand, place children at risk of poor relationships with others due to difficulties in comprehending others, which makes it difficult to respond in an appropriate manner. This process is explained by theorizations about the role of verbal (neuropsychological) deficits in the early development of antisocial behavior (e.g., Moffitt, 1993; Nigg & Huang-Pollock, 2003) and is consistent with recent research demonstrating that low

receptive language places children at risk of poor peer relationships, which in turn contributes to the development of behavior problems (Menting et al., 2011).

We thus can expect transactional rather than unidirectional effects between close teacher-child relationships and children's receptive language abilities. The language development of children with high receptive language ability could be accelerated in the context of a close teacher-child relationship, creating a positive cascade, whereas the language development of children with poor receptive language skills may be further impeded because they are at risk of less close relationships with teachers. This transactional hypothesis is consistent with social-ecological models of child development that emphasize the dynamic interplay between child dispositions and (social) environmental influences on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Sameroff, 2000), but contradicts child-driven or disorder-driven models (Ladd, 2006), which state that the course of development is determined by child dispositions or early emerging dysfunctions of the child.

As discussed above, research on both friendship relationships and parent-child relationships underscore that trust and felt security in interactions with the communication partner are important determinants of language acquisition. For this reason, in the current study, we focused on the dimension of trust and positive affect (i.e., closeness) of the teacher-child relationship to examine the contribution of teacher-child relationships to children's language development. In addition, we aimed to examine developmental associations between teacher-child closeness and receptive language rather than language expression for three reasons. First, receptive language seems more strongly related to environmental influences like caregiver-child

relationships than language expression (e.g., Raviv, et al., 2004). Second, receptive language is at the foundation of other language skills, including expressive language, and appears a better indicator of the overall language ability of young children than language expression (Justice, et al., 2008). Third, there are marked individual differences in receptive language growth across different ages: recent research, for example, demonstrates that the gap between at-risk and non-risk children in receptive language tends to widen in the early school years (Taylor, et al., 2013). The early school years are thus an important developmental period to examine the effects of environmental influences on gains in receptive language. In the next sections, we discuss the mixed evidence for a developmental link between teacher-child closeness and cognitive development in general and the handful of studies that have focused on closeness and receptive language specifically.

**General effects of closeness on cognitive development.** The importance of positive, non-conflicted teacher-child relationships as a predictor of children's cognitive growth is widely acknowledged (Hughes, 2012; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004a). Several studies have reported main effects of teacher-child closeness on cognitive outcomes (Ahnert, Milatz, Kappler, Schneiderwind, & Fischer, 2013; Maldonado-Carreño & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Mercer & DeRosier, 2008). However, effects on independent achievement test scores (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Maldonado-Carreño & Votruba-Drzal, 2011) are not always found, or found only in academically at-risk samples (Hughes, 2011; Hughes, et al., 2008).

**Effects of closeness on receptive language.** There is some, albeit mixed, evidence for a specific link between closeness and receptive language. Peisner-Feinberg and colleagues (2001)

reported that close relationships with preschool teachers predicted modest increases in receptive language (but not reading ability) over a 5-year period (preschool to second grade) above and beyond relevant background variables and observed classroom practices. When teacher-child closeness was examined as a time-varying predictor in the same sample, but without inclusion of observed classroom practices, slightly different results emerged: closeness predicted increases in receptive language, but the predictive effect applied primarily to African American children and declined over time (Burchinal, Peisner Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002). Other studies that controlled for previous test scores or looked at gains within a given school year, however, report no predictive effects for teacher-child closeness on receptive language. Pianta and Stuhlman (2004b) did not find a predictive effect of teacher-child closeness in preschool and kindergarten on achievement tests including verbal comprehension in grade 1. In addition, Howes et al. (2008) found small effects of closeness on gains in literacy and teacher-rated language ability over a 6-month period but not on independent tests of receptive language, in a large sample of pre-kindergarten children.

**The reversed link: Effects of children's language abilities on closeness.** Researchers have also considered language ability to be a predictor of close teacher-child relationships. In a cross-sectional study, Justice et al. (2008) found receptive language (but not language expression) predictive of teacher-child closeness among preschool children. Rudasill et al. (2006) did not find an association between expressed language complexity and closeness, but expressed language complexity was associated with teacher-child conflict for bolder children.

In sum, the emerging evidence for the hypothesized developmental link between teacher-child closeness and receptive language is mixed. In addition, research has examined either closeness as a predictor of language, or language as a predictor of closeness, and has not examined transactional associations.

**The possible effects of confounding factors.** When studying the transactional linkages between closeness and receptive language, the possibility of confounding variables should be considered. Deficits in language achievement and achievement in general have been related to poor self-regulation and child behavior problems. Children with behavior problems demonstrate less growth in emergent literacy, vocabulary, and math than children without behavior problems (McClelland, et al., 2007; Spira, Bracken, & Fischel, 2005; Spira & Fischel, 2005; Vallotton & Ayoub, 2011). It is possible that behavior problems directly interfere with learning processes and instruction, but it is also possible that behavior problems hinder language achievement indirectly: Behaviorally-challenging children tend to develop poor-quality relationships with peers and teachers, which impedes the beneficial effects of close relationships on language (Ladd, Buhs, & Seid, 2000; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008). It is thus possible that developmental links between closeness and language achievement are (partly) driven by child behavioral characteristics.

Peer influences could be another confounding factor. As mentioned above, close relationships with peers facilitate children's language development (Hoff, 2006; Jones, 2002; Pellegrini, et al., 1997). Conversely, being socially isolated, disliked or rejected by peers can seriously impede the language development of a child. Because teachers and peers are part of the

same social setting, the quality of children's relationships with teachers and peers in the same classroom is considered interrelated (Leflot, van Lier, Verschueren, Onghena, & Colpin, 2011; Mercer & DeRosier, 2008). In addition, the results of two methodologically-strong studies suggest that the longitudinal effects of teacher support on child behavior problems may be trivial in comparison to the effects of peer social status (Leflot, et al., 2011; Mercer & DeRosier, 2008). Thus, for a stringent test of developmental associations between teacher-child closeness and receptive language development, it is necessary to statistically control for the quality of peer interactions.

### **Present Study**

We aimed to test a model of transactional associations between closeness with teachers and receptive language. Based on a social-interactionist perspective on language acquisition, we predicted positive effects of closeness on receptive language (e.g., Burchinal, et al., 2002; Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001). We also assumed that receptive language would predict closeness because children who have difficulties understanding others are less able to engage in personal conversations, which could seriously hinder the development of close relationships (Justice, et al., 2008; Menting et al., 2011; Rudasill, et al., 2006). These predictions are in accord with social-ecological models positing that both child dispositions and environmental influences contribute to children's development. To test the hypothesized transactional links between closeness and receptive language, we used an autoregressive cross-lagged design (Jöreskog, 1970). Autoregressive cross-lagged models have been advocated as optimal, yet conservative tests of developmental processes and directions of effects (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). To our

knowledge, no studies to date have examined teacher-child closeness and language ability longitudinally and in parallel across multiple waves of data.

Whereas prior research has predominantly focused on the early childhood years, this three-wave study extends this age period beyond school entry into the early elementary school (up to age 8-9). We also tested whether the association between closeness and receptive language would be invariant across time. It is possible that the effects of teacher-child closeness on language may diminish over time as individual differences in vocabulary growth become increasingly stable (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006; Farkas & Beron, 2004). However, there is also research suggesting that academic development and vocabulary growth in the early and middle elementary school years continues to be influenced by teachers (Gámez & Lesaux, 2012; Maldonado-Carreño & Votruba-Drzal, 2011).

We included indicators of children's social experiences with peers in the classroom (i.e., peer problems) and child behavioral functioning (i.e., conduct problems) in the model as possible confounds. Time-invariant covariates included in the model were child sex (e.g., Spilt, Koomen, & Jak, 2012), socioeconomic status (e.g., Raviv, Kessenich, & Morrison, 2004), and ethnic minority status and main language spoken at home (e.g., Bradley, Draca, Green, & Leeves, 2007; Saft & Pianta, 2001).

## Method

### Participants and Selection

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

The sample included children, parents, and teachers participating in the Kindergarten cohort of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC K-cohort). The LSAC K-cohort sample ( $N = 4,983$ ) represents 57% of the potential sample of families identified within the sampling frame as having a 4-5 year old child. At recruitment (Wave 1), children (50.9% boys) ranged in age from 51 to 67 months ( $M = 56.9$ ,  $SD = 2.6$ ). The LSAC K-cohort is a nationally representative sample that matches population data on demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, cultural background, and socio-economic status) as ascertained by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data from 2001 (Gray & Smart, 2008).

The sampling frame for LSAC was the Health Insurance Commission's Medicare database, the most comprehensive database of Australia's population. Children in the scope of the survey were those aged 4 years 3 months to 5 years. In order to select a representative sample of Australia's children, a two-stage clustered design, based on postcodes, was used. Stratification ensured proportional geographic representation for each of Australia's eight states and territories and, within these, for capital city and rest of state areas. Postcodes were randomly selected with probability proportional to size selection, and with equal probability for small population postcodes. Children were randomly selected with approximately equal chance of selection for each child (about one in 25). Sample selection also sought to recruit children born across all months of the calendar year.

Because of missing data (see missing data analyses below), the final sample included 4,707 children (51% boys). The majority of children (88.5%) spoke English as the main language at home, 14.0% were from low SES families (one SD *below* the mean or lower), and

3.3% of the children had an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural background.

Children who were excluded based on missingness on all dependent variables were more often from families with low socioeconomic status ( $\chi^2(1) = 65.4, p < .001$ ) and from families whose main language was not English ( $\chi^2(1) = 61.0, p < .001$ ) than included children. In addition, excluded children were more often children with an Indigenous background ( $\chi^2(1) = 42.4, p < .001$ ).

### Procedure

The LSAC design includes a biennial home visit with the parent and child at Wave 1 (age 4-5 years), Wave 2 (age 6-7 years), Wave 3 (age 8-9 years). Home visits include a structured interview conducted by trained interviewers and computer-assisted self-administered questionnaires. The percentage of parents who completed the interviews and questionnaires was 100% at Wave 1, 98% at Wave 2, and 88% at Wave 3. Interviewers administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and other child assessments, and in Waves 2 and 3 assisted children to complete a self-report questionnaire. At Wave 1, Wave 2, and Wave 3 the PPVT was administered to 88%, 99% and 99% of the children, respectively. At each wave, with the consent of parents, a questionnaire was mailed to the child's classroom teacher for completion and return. Questionnaire return rates increased from 69% at Wave 1 to 82% and 85% at Wave 2 and 3. Full information about the interviews and content is available elsewhere (AIFS, 2009).

### Measures

**Receptive language.** The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III; Dunn & Dunn, 1997) is a widely-used measure of oral receptive vocabulary with high-quality

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

psychometric properties. The examiner says a word and the child responds by pointing to the picture that illustrates the meaning of that word. For each wave of the LSAC, a shortened version of the PPVT was developed, based on work done in the United States for the Head Start Impact Study, with permission of the publisher (Rothman, 2003, 2005). The Adapted PPVT-III yields a standardized Rasch-modelled score. Correlations of between .93 to .97 were found between the full PPVT-III and the Adapted PPVT-III in separate samples of 215 children aged from 41 to 66 months and 421 children aged 67 to 95 months.

**Teacher-child relationship.** Teachers' reports of Closeness with the child were obtained with the Student Teacher Relationship Scale-Short Form (STRS; Pianta, 2001). The Closeness subscale comprised 8 items (e.g., "Shares an affectionate relationship") rated on a scale ranging from 1 (Definitely does not apply) to 5 (Definitely applies). The STRS has demonstrated sound psychometric properties in previous research (Doumen, et al., 2009; Koomen, Verschueren, van Schooten, Jak, & Pianta, 2012; Pianta, 2001). In the current sample, the Cronbach's alphas ranged from .83 to .85 across waves.

**Peer interaction quality and Child behavioral functioning.** Teachers and parents completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997). The SDQ is a widely-used screening questionnaire with adequate psychometric properties (Achenbach, et al., 2008; Goodman, 2001; Hawes & Dadds, 2004). The subscale Peer problems was selected as a broad measure of peer interaction quality. This subscale comprises 2 positive (e.g., "Generally liked by other children"; reversed coded) and 3 negative items (e.g., "Picked on or bullied by other children"). The subscale Conduct problems was selected as a measure of (poor) child

behavioral functioning. This subscale comprises 1 positive (e.g., “Generally well behaved, usually does what adults request”; reversed coded) and 4 negative items (e.g., “Often loses temper”). Items were rated on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 (Not true) to 3 (Certainly true).

Correlations between teacher and parent reports ranged between .25 and .42 ( $p < .001$ ) for Conduct problems, and between .32 and .39 ( $p < .001$ ) for Peer problems across waves. The magnitude of these correlations among raters is in line with the literature (e.g., Kerr, Lunkenheimer, & Olson, 2007). Although we aimed to control for children’s social experiences in the classroom, we did not rely exclusively on teacher reports but used aggregated measures of teacher and parent reports in order to avoid (or reduce) possible same-source variance. The Cronbach’s alphas of the aggregated subscales ranged from .66 to .73 for Peer problems and from .74 to .75 for Conduct problems in the current sample.

**Covariates.** Data was collected on child sex (1 = Female, 0 = Male), the main language that children spoke at home (1 = English, 0 = other), and Indigenous cultural background (1 = Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 0 = not Indigenous). A z-score for socioeconomic position (SEP) among families was derived from information about parental education, parent income, and occupational prestige (Blakemore, Gibbings, & Strazdins, 2006), which was transformed to a binary variable to facilitate interpretation. A score of 0 indicated low SEP (one SD *below* the mean or lower), whereas a score of 1 indicated average to high SEP (*above* one SD below the mean).

## Data Analysis

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

The Mplus program (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2011) was used to analyze autoregressive cross-lagged models. The MLR estimator was used to account for possible non-normality. The MLR estimator provides maximum likelihood parameter estimates with standard errors and a chi-square test statistic that are robust to non-normality. Model fit is considered good when confirmatory fit index (CFI) is  $\geq .95$ , the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is  $\leq .08$ , and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is  $\leq .06$  (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  difference test was used for model selection (Satorra & Bentler, 2001). Because of the large sample size, alpha was set at  $\leq .01$  (two tailed) for model comparisons to reduce the likelihood of a Type-1 error. Parameter estimates were considered significant at the 99% confidence interval.

Of note, in most studies on teacher-child relationships researchers have to account for multilevel variance due to hierarchical clustering of the data. Note that the LSAC data are not nested due to the data collection strategy.

**Model fitting.** Given the number of variables in the model, many models may fit the data well. Therefore, it is a common strategy in testing autoregressive cross-lagged models to compare the model fit of increasingly complex models in order to identify the most parsimonious model. We tested a series of four nested models. First, starting with the most parsimonious model, a *Baseline autoregressive model* was examined to assess continuity or stability within measures over time as well as concurrent associations but without cross-lagged paths. In the second model, we added direct cross-time paths from conduct problems to all other variables as well as cross-time paths from language to all other variables. We labeled this second model the

*Child-driven model* because this model included unidirectional paths from child characteristics (receptive language ability and conduct problems) to social influences (peer problems and teacher-child closeness) but not vice versa, suggesting that child characteristics are the driving force behind changes in the variables over time. However, note that this *Child-driven (unidirectional) model* was not in line with our predictions. The third model examined bidirectional (transactional) paths between child characteristics and social influences by adding cross-time paths from teacher-child closeness and peer problems to both conduct problems and receptive language. This model was labeled the *Transactional model*. By comparing the *Child-driven model* with the *Transactional model*, we tested our basic assumption that social relationships have an influence on child development, specifically receptive language development. Moreover, by comparing the *Child-driven model* with the *Transactional model*, it was tested whether teacher-child closeness predicts language above and beyond child dispositions. Finally, a *Full model* was tested with all cross-lagged paths possible, including cross-time paths between teacher-child closeness and peer problems. Testing cross-lagged paths between teacher-child closeness and peer problems was not part of our study's aim and we therefore did not state an a-priori hypotheses. In all models, we controlled for covariates (i.e., Child sex, SEP, Indigenous status, Main language).

**Missing data.** Mplus offers the advantage to accommodate incomplete data on the dependent variables using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation under the assumption of missing at random (MAR). Cases with missing data on the covariate variables (0.4%) and cases with missing data on all dependent variables (5.2%) were excluded from the

analyses. The covariance coverage matrix provides information on the extent of missing data estimation for the remaining sample. The covariance coverage ranged between .515 and .976 across all data points, which is well above the minimum threshold of .100 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2011).

Auxiliary variables were used to facilitate missing data analyses. Auxiliary variables included the Conflict subscale of the STRS and other teacher- and parent-rated SDQ subscales (i.e., Prosocial skills, Emotional problems) at all waves; parent-reports of child school liking (e.g., “How much does your child like his/her teacher(s)?”), and the ‘Who Am I?’ school readiness measure of skills in literacy and numeracy (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1999) at Wave 1; the Matrix Reasoning test from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV; Wechsler, 2003), and child-reports of teacher liking (“Do you like to see your teacher when you get at school?”) and peer liking (“Are the children at school nice to you?”) at Wave 2 and 3. Auxiliary variables are not part of the measurement model and thus do not influence the model.

## Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations among the constructs at all waves. All correlations were in the expected directions.

**Model selection.** First, a model with autoregressive pathways within constructs and within-time correlations among constructs was tested (*Baseline model*). The fit of the model was moderate ( $\chi^2(40) = 825.4$ ; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .05; CFI = .93). Second, cross-lagged paths were added from Language and Conduct problems to Peer problems and Closeness as well as

cross-lagged paths between Language and Conduct problems (*Child-driven model*), which significantly improved the model ( $\Delta\chi^2(12) = 311.9, p < .0001$ ). Third, cross-lagged paths were added from Peer problems and Closeness to Language and Conduct problems (*Transactional model*). Again, model fit improved significantly ( $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 82.6, p < .0001$ ). Fourth, cross-lagged paths were added from Closeness to Peer problems and vice versa (*Full model*). The change in model fit did not meet our significance level of  $p < .01$  ( $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 10.3, p = .03$ ). Therefore, the Full model was rejected and the Transactional model was selected as the best model. The overall fit of this final model was satisfactory ( $\chi^2(20) = 459.6$ ; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .02; CFI = .96). We then tested whether the cross-lagged paths between language and closeness were invariant across time. We compared a model with paths constrained over time with a model with unconstrained paths over time. The effects of Receptive language on Closeness ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .405, p = .32$ ) and the effects of Closeness on Receptive language were invariant across time ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .994, p = .32$ ).

**Cross-sectional links between covariates and study variables.** In the final model, child gender and socioeconomic position (SEP) were significant predictors of the dependent variables at all waves. Main language and Indigenous status were significant predictors at age 4/5 only. Specifically, girls had Closer relationships with teachers at all ages ( $\beta$ s = .23 to .30), less Peer problems at age 4/5 and 6/7 ( $\beta$ s = -.09 to -.18), and less Conduct problems at all ages ( $\beta$ s = -.19 to -.24). In addition, girls had higher Receptive language scores than boys at age 4/5 ( $\beta = .16$ ) but lower scores at age 6/7 ( $\beta = -.19$ ). Children with average to high SEP had Closer relationships with teachers at age 4/5 and 6/7 ( $\beta$ s = .15 to .31), less Peer problems at all ages ( $\beta$ s = -.16 to -

.46), less Conduct problems at all ages ( $\beta$ s = -.17 to -.41), and higher Receptive language scores at all ages ( $\beta$ s = .18 to .48). Children whose main language was English had Closer relationships with teachers ( $\beta$  = .27), less Peer problems ( $\beta$  = -.33), and higher Receptive language scores ( $\beta$  = .74) at age 4/5 only. Main language did not predict Conduct problems. Indigenous children had more Peer problems ( $\beta$  = .32), lower Receptive language scores ( $\beta$  = -.23), and more Conduct problems ( $\beta$  = .41) at age 4/5 only. Indigenous status did not predict Closeness.

**Hypothesized developmental links between study variables.** Figure 1 presents the final, time-constrained, transactional model with regression coefficients of the developmental paths significant at the 99% confidence interval. As expected, transactional associations between language and closeness were found (Table 2). Receptive language at age 4/5 and age 6/7 predicted an increase in Closeness at age 6/7 and age 8/9, respectively. Closeness at ages 4/5 and 6/7 predicted increases in Receptive language at ages 6/7 and 8/9, respectively.

Multi-group analyses, comparing models with the cross-lagged paths between closeness and language constrained across groups and unconstrained across groups, showed that the cross-lagged paths were similar for boys versus girls ( $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 3.924, p = .42$ ), for children with a low SEP versus average to high SEP ( $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 0.565, p = .97$ ), for Indigenous children versus non-Indigenous children ( $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 6.189, p = .19$ ), and for children who spoke English at home versus children who did not ( $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 4.829, p = .31$ ). In addition, we created subgroups of children with low receptive language abilities (one or more SD below the mean on the PPVT) versus average to high receptive language abilities (one SD below the mean or higher) at age 4/5. The cross-lagged effects did not differ between these subgroups ( $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 5.021, p = .29$ ).

Finally, because of possible rater bias, we examined two additional models. First, we re-examined the model using only parent reports of peer problems and conduct problems ( $\chi^2(20)=532.9$ ; RMSEA= .08; SRMR= .03; CFI= .95). Second, we re-examined the model using only teacher reports of peer problems and conduct problems ( $\chi^2(20)=305.8$ ; RMSEA= .06; SRMR= .02; CFI= .96). Both models showed adequate fit and demonstrated similar cross-lagged paths between closeness and receptive language to the original model.

### **Discussion**

This study indicates that children's receptive language development in the early school years is promoted in the context of a close teacher-child relationship. It is among the first studies to demonstrate a reciprocal effect between closeness and language development in the general population. The findings complement and extend previous research that has found teacher-child closeness to be a predictor of developmental changes in receptive language in early childhood (Burchinal, et al., 2002; Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001) and literacy (Howes et al., 2008), and a predictor of developmental changes in reading and grammar in at-risk samples (Hughes, 2011; Liew, et al., 2010; Schmitt, et al., 2012). It also confirms processes found in cross-sectional research demonstrating that teachers develop closer relationships with children with higher language abilities (Justice, et al., 2008; Rudasill, et al., 2006). Our findings, however, contradict research that failed to find a prospective effect of closeness on receptive language (Howes, et al., 2008; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004b).

### **Close Teacher-Child Relationships Facilitate the Development of Receptive Language**

*Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental Psychology. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>*

In line with social-interactionist perspectives on language acquisition that emphasize the importance of close relationships with communication partners, we found children's receptive language promoted in the context of a close teacher-child relationship. In addition, a consistent effect of receptive language on closeness was found across waves. This indicates that not only close relationships promote language skills but also that young students with better receptive language skills develop closer relationships with their primary school teachers (cf. Justice, et al., 2008; Rudasill, et al., 2006). Good receptive language skills are needed to engage in more sophisticated and extended conversations with teachers, which in turn appears to contribute to the development of a close and affectionate relationship. This in turn has a positive effect on subsequent growth in receptive language. Thus, the results suggest that the language development of children with high language ability is accelerated in the context of a close teacher-child relationship, creating a positive cascade in the first school years. Conversely, children with poor language abilities are at-risk of less close relationships with teachers in the first school years, which appears to further enlarge individual differences in language development.

Previous longitudinal research in the US has yielded mixed support for a developmental link between closeness and receptive language in the preschool years and early elementary years. Some longitudinal studies did find a positive effect (Burchinal, et al., 2002; Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001), whereas other studies that controlled for previous test scores or examined gains within a given school year did not (Howes et al., 2008; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004b). It is difficult to explain these differences as these previous studies were fairly similar with respect to sample

characteristics, measurement, and analyses. The present study with a nationally-representative sample of Australian children, however, expands prior studies in at least three ways. First, we examined bidirectional associations between closeness and receptive language, instead of unidirectional effects from closeness to language or vice versa, showing that language and closeness are reciprocally related. Second, this study provides an especially stringent test of the developmental link between receptive language and closeness because we controlled for child behavior problems and peer interaction problems as possible confounds in addition to relevant background variables. Third, we included an older age range, showing that the importance of close and personal relationships with school teachers for children's receptive language development extends well beyond the early childhood period.

Because several previous studies have failed to find main effects of closeness on cognitive development (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004b), it has been suggested in the literature that closeness is important only for the cognitive development of at-risk children (e.g., Baker, 2006). The present study provides new and strong support for a general promotive effect of closeness on cognitive development for all children as indicated by a positive (albeit small) main effect on receptive language development. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the current findings contradict the suggestion found in some of the literature that associations between teacher-child relationships and achievement can be fully explained by a preference of teachers for relationships with children with higher academic skills and not by a promotive effect of close teacher-child relationships on language (cf. Maldonado et al., 2011). In addition, the use of a well-established independent test as the measure of receptive language development

excludes the possibility of teacher bias related to a tendency of teachers to rate students with whom they have a close relationship higher on language and other academic skills (cf. Maldonado et al., 2011).

The effects of close teacher-child relationships on language and vice versa were very modest. Other studies of teacher and peer influences on children's language development have reported similarly small effects (Mashburn, Justice, Downer, & Pianta, 2009; Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001). Several explanations are possible for the small effects. Although the assessment of receptive language was objective and standardized, the measure was not aligned with children's language curriculum at school. Curriculum-referenced assessment could have yielded stronger links between closeness and receptive language. On the other hand, using a more general test of receptive language may indicate that closeness truly contributes to aspects of children's broader language development than only to their school performance in language. In addition, the developmental link between closeness and language was found in a community sample and may be larger for specific at-risk groups of children (Burchinal et al., 2002; Justice et al. 2008), although our analyses indicated that the results did not differ depending on socioeconomic position, Indigenous ethnicity, initial level of receptive language skills at age 4/5 or whether children spoke English at home or not.

The small developmental association between closeness and language may also indicate that other factors are more important. In a study on home literacy, Leseman and De Jong (1998) infer that the opportunity to engage in language-related activities (i.e., exposure) and instruction quality are more proximal predictors of language development than the quality of the caregiver-

child relationship (see also Howes et al., 2008). In addition, the effect of closeness may be dependent on such variables. It could be that the promotive effect of closeness on language learning may be maximized in the context of high instruction quality but closeness may add little to language learning when instruction quality is low or when there is little opportunity to engage in language activities (Pianta et al., 2008). Unfortunately, instruction quality has not been assessed in the LSAC study.

Lastly, the age range should be considered as a possible explanation for the small effects. It has been suggested that the basis for receptive vocabulary development is laid in the earlier years of childhood prior to formal school entry and may become increasingly stable afterwards (Burchinal, et al., 2002; Dickinson, et al., 2006). This implies that, in comparison to parents and preschool teachers, school teachers may have a limited impact on the vocabulary development of children. However, the analyses of invariance of the effects of time suggest that the effects of close teacher-child relationships, although modest, may continue without decline throughout the elementary school years. Longitudinal research covering a larger developmental period is needed to further examine these assumptions.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several qualifications of the research should be considered. First, we aimed to control for children's relationship experiences within the same social setting, i.e., the classroom. However, the measure of peer interaction problems represents an indirect measure of children's experiences with peers. A direct measure of peer relationships in the classroom was not available, given that children's peers were not part of the LSAC study design.

A second limitation to be considered is that autoregressive cross-lagged designs do not prove causation. Although two key confounds were included in the model, the possibility of spurious associations among constructs due to the omission of unmeasured ‘cause variables’ cannot be ruled out (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). Based on the literature, it can be expected that the parent-child relationship predicts initial levels of, and some degree of continuity in, both teacher-child relationship quality and language abilities (O'Connor & McCartney, 2006; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). However, because initial levels and stability were controlled for in the transactional model, parent-child relationships were not likely to account for the transactional links between closeness and language. Third, the findings of this study are limited to developmental links between closeness and (oral) receptive language. It would be interesting in future research to examine developmental associations between closeness and other measures of vocabulary (e.g., word comprehension, productive vocabulary, cf. Pearson, Hiebert, & Kamil, 2007) as well as other language skills (e.g., language complexity, cf. Rudasill et al., 2006) or curriculum-based assessments. Fourth, teacher reports of closeness provide an indirect measure of children’s experiences and generally show modest convergence with children’s own reports of relationship quality (e.g., Doumen, et al., 2009). The measurement of closeness could be improved by using a multi-informant approach including the child’s perceptions but perhaps also the perceptions of peers (e.g., Doumen, et al., 2009). Fifth, it should be noted that teacher-child relationship quality is typically described along three separate dimensions: closeness, conflict, and dependency (Koomen, et al., 2012; Pianta, 2001). Because the social-interactionist theory on language acquisition emphasizes the importance of closeness and affection in dyadic

relationships, we focused on closeness in this study. In addition, there seems to be less evidence for a direct link between conflict and language comprehension (Justice, et al., 2008) or other language abilities (Oades-Sese & Li, 2011; Schmitt, et al., 2012). Finally, it should be noted that we divided our sample into children from a low versus children from an average-to-high socioeconomic background (SEP). To ensure that this did not affect the results, we re-examined the final model using a continuous z-score of SEP, which yielded virtually the same results.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research needs to further unravel why it is that receptive language development is promoted in the context of close teacher-child relationships. It is hypothesized that a child who shares a close relationship with his teacher has more personalized and extended one-to-one conversations with his teacher. To test this latter assumption, researchers could examine the frequency, quality or complexity, and emotional-valence of dyadic teacher-child conversations as mediating mechanisms (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). The quality of verbal interaction could be observed in social activities and reading-focused activities. Furthermore, the positive effects of close teacher-child relationships on motivation for learning and classroom participation may account for the effects of close teacher-child relationships on improved receptive language (Hughes, et al., 2008). In addition, children with close relationships may receive academic instruction tailored to their educational and emotional needs, which enhances cognitive processing of instruction and subsequent learning (Crosnoe, et al., 2010).

It is important to consider instructional dimensions in addition to emotional dimensions of teacher-child relationships. Warm relationships may promote language-related skills and

facilitate language development, but for full language mastery explicit instruction is also needed (Pianta, 2006). Future research could examine the relative influence of emotional and instructional aspects of teacher-child interactions on language development (e.g., Howes, et al., 2008), or whether the impact of instruction is dependent on the emotional quality of the relationship with the teacher (e.g., Crosnoe, et al., 2010; Pianta, et al., 2008). Observational research is recommended for a detailed study of language exposure and informal (e.g., personal conversation) and formal activities (e.g., language lessons) and quantity and quality of received instruction and feedback in relation to teacher-child relationship qualities. Finally, it remains to be examined whether the findings are specific for children's receptive language development or whether the findings represent a more general effect of closeness on cognitive development.

### **Conclusions and Practical Implications**

Language plays a vital role in children's socio-behavioral and school development. Taking into consideration the increasing stability of externalizing problems and achievement trajectories in mid-elementary school (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004; Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts, & Morrison, 2008), it is critically important to identify malleable factors in children's early school environment that can improve language development and indirectly influence trajectories of externalizing problems and academic problems. This study highlights close teacher-child relationships as a means through which children's language development can be promoted in the early school years. Although intervention research on dyadic teacher-child relationships is still at an early stage, there are several programs that have yielded promising results, including dyadic intervention based on play therapy (Driscoll &

Pianta, 2010), individualized consultant-facilitated teacher reflection on relationships with individual children (Spilt, Koomen, Thijs, & van der Leij, 2012), and individualized coaching of teachers to improve classroom interactions (Cappella, et al., 2012) These programs may be especially interesting to encourage the development of close relationships between teachers and children with low language abilities. Moreover, in future research, these interventions could be used to experimentally manipulate teacher-child closeness and obtain evidence for a causal effect of closeness on children's cognitive development in general and language development specifically.

## Tables

*Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations across Constructs and Ages (age 4/5, age 6/7, age 8/9)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	<i>M (SD)</i>
1. Peer problems 4/5												1.32 (.28)
2. Peer problems 6/7	.42											1.29 (.28)
3. Peer problems 8/9	.36	.51										1.29 (.30)
4. Conduct problems 4/5	.29	.27	.26									1.40 (.34)
5. Conduct problems 6/7	.24	.43	.35	.49								1.24 (.26)
6. Conduct problems 8/9	.20	.31	.47	.42	.60							1.22 (.28)
7. Language 4/5	-.18	-.12	-.13	-.13	-.13	-.14						64.4 (6.0)
8. Language 6/7	-.12	-.06	-.06	-.10	-.10	-.09	.47					73.9 (5.1)
9. Language 8/9	-.14	-.07	-.08	-.11	-.11	-.11	.42	.53				78.4 (4.9)
10. Closeness 4/5	-.36	-.20	-.14	-.20	-.14	-.12	.16	.15	.13			4.34 (.64)
11. Closeness 6/7	-.13	-.23	-.10	-.11	-.18	-.10	.09	.08	.10	.24		4.20 (.62)
12. Closeness 8/9	-.10	-.10	-.18	-.09	-.12	-.21	.10	.06	.07	.21	.25	4.03 (.67)

*Note.* All correlations were significant at  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)

APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>

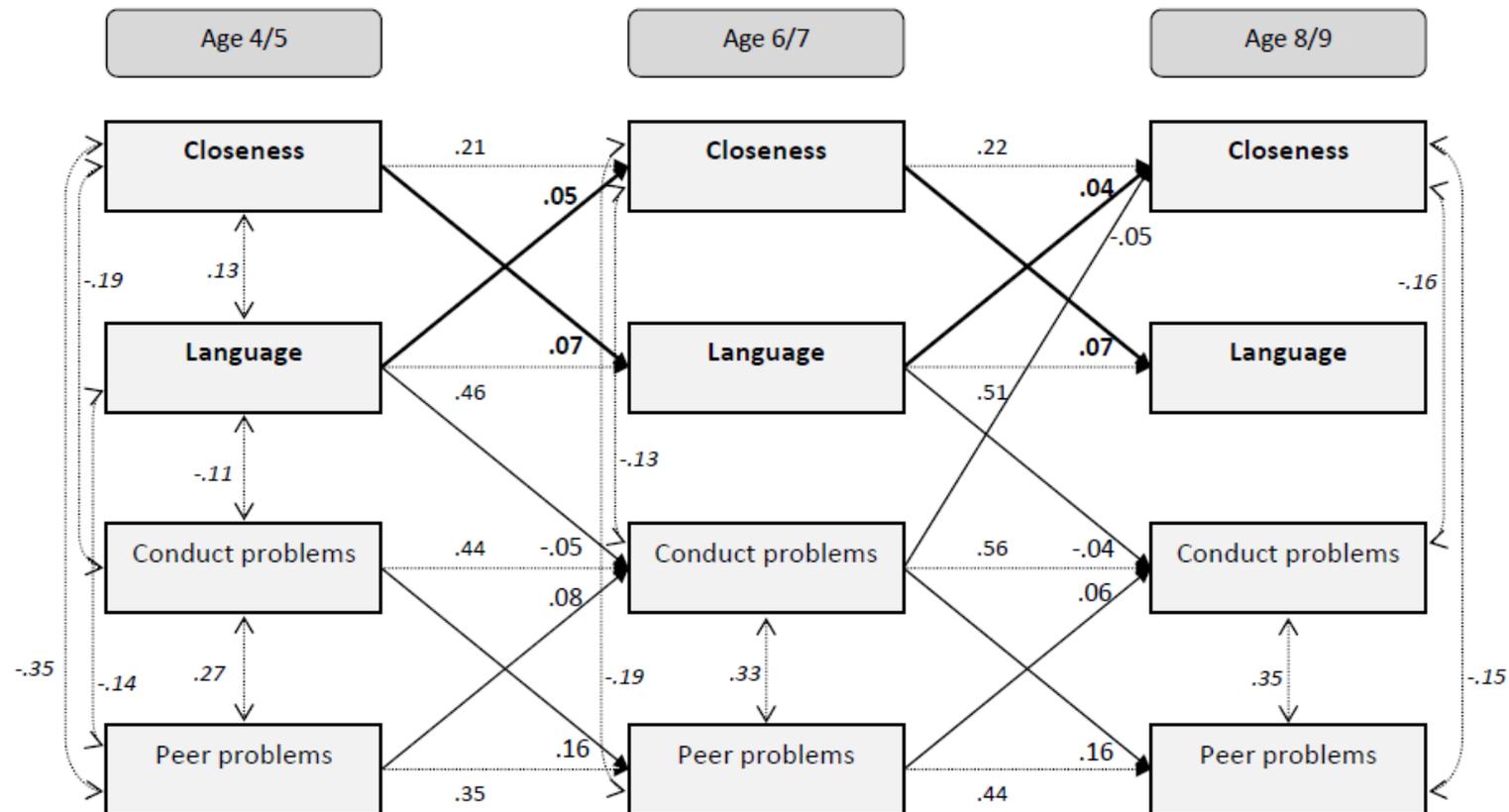
*Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers. Developmental  
Journal and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the*

*Table 2.* Standardized Cross-lagged Paths between Teacher-Child Closeness and Receptive Language

	$\beta$	99% Confidence Interval
Closeness Age 4/5 $\rightarrow$ Language Age 6/7	.068	.037 - .100
Closeness Age 6/7 $\rightarrow$ Language Age 8/9	.068	.037 - .099
Language Age 4/5 $\rightarrow$ Closeness Age 6/7	.047	.010 - .083
Language Age 6/7 $\rightarrow$ Closeness Age 8/9	.036	.008 - .065

Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). *Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers*. *Developmental Psychology*. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>

Figure 1: Developmental Links between Teacher-Child Closeness and Receptive Language while controlling for changes in Peer Interaction Quality (Peer problems) and Child Behavioral Functioning (Conduct problems)



Note: Standardized path coefficients (single-headed arrows) and within-wave correlations (double-headed arrows, estimates in italics) significant at the 99% confidence interval are presented. Correlations of the constructs at age 4/5, 6/7, and 8/9 with the time-invariant

Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). *Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers*. *Developmental Psychology*. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>

covariates (Gender, SEP, Language spoken at home, Indigenous ethnicity) were present but not depicted. The thick arrows represent the hypothesized cross-lagged paths between Closeness and Receptive Language.

## References

- Achenbach, T. M., Becker, A., Döpfner, M., Heiervang, E., Roessner, V., Steinhausen, H.-C., et al. (2008). Multicultural assessment of child and adolescent psychopathology with aseba and sdq instruments: Research findings, applications, and future directions. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 49*, 251-275. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01867.x
- Ahnert, L., Milatz, A., Kappler, G., Schneiderwind, J., & Fischer, R. (2013). The impact of teacher–child relationships on child cognitive performance as explored by a priming paradigm. *Developmental Psychology, 49*, 554-567. doi: 10.1037/a0031283
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) (2009). *Growing up in Australia: The 30 longitudinal study of Australian children*. Available at: [www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/](http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/)
- Baker, J. A. (2006). Contributions of teacher–child relationships to positive school adjustment during elementary school. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*, 211-229. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2006.02.002
- Baker, J. A., Grant, S., & Morlock, L. (2008). The teacher-student relationship as a developmental context for children with internalizing or externalizing behavior problems. *School Psychology Quarterly, 23*, 3-15. doi: 10.1037/1045-3830.23.1.3
- Blakemore, T., Gibbings, J., & Strazdins, L. (2006, December). *Measuring the socioeconomic position of families in hilda and lsac*. Paper presented at the Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated (ACSPRI) Conference, Sydney.
- Bradley, S., Draca, M., Green, C., & Leeves, G. (2007). The magnitude of educational disadvantage of indigenous minority groups in australia. *Journal of Population Economics, 20*, 547-569. doi: 10.1007/s00148-006-0076-9
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*, 513-531. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513
- Burchinal, M. R., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Pianta, R., & Howes, C. (2002). Development of academic skills from preschool through second grade: Family and classroom predictors of developmental trajectories. *Journal of School Psychology, 40*, 415-436. doi: 10.1016/S0022-4405(02)00107-3
- Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., & Harrison, L.J. (2014). *Language Development in the Early School Years: The Importance of Close Relationships with Teachers*. *Developmental Psychology*. DOI: 10.1037/a0038540. ©2015 by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is a post print and may not exactly replicate the final version published in the APA journal. It is not the copy of record. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038540>

- Bus, A. G., & Van Ijzendoorn, M. H. (1988). Mother-child interactions, attachment, and emergent literacy: A cross-sectional study. *Child Development*, 1262-1272. doi: 10.2307/1130489
- Bus, A. G., & van Ijzendoorn, M. H. (1997). Affective dimension of mother-infant picturebook reading. *Journal of School Psychology*, 35, 47-60. doi: 10.1016/S0022-4405(96)00030-1
- Cappella, E., Hamre, B. K., Kim, H. Y., Henry, D. B., Frazier, S. L., Atkins, M. S., et al. (2012). Teacher consultation and coaching within mental health practice: Classroom and child effects in urban elementary schools. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 80, 597-610. doi: 10.1037/a0027725
- Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 41, 33-54. doi: 10.1111/1469-7610.00548
- Crosnoe, R., Morrison, F., Burchinal, M., Pianta, R., Keating, D., Friedman, S. L., et al. (2010). Instruction, teacher–student relations, and math achievement trajectories in elementary school. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102, 407-417. doi: 10.1037/a0017762.
- Dickinson, D. K., McCabe, A., & Essex, M. J. (2006). A window of opportunity we must open to all: The case for preschool with high-quality support for language and literacy. *Handbook of early literacy research*, 2, 11-28.
- Dickinson, D. K., & Porche, M. V. (2011). Relation between language experiences in preschool classrooms and children's kindergarten and fourth-grade language and reading abilities. *Child Development*, 82, 870-886. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01576.x
- Doumen, S., Verschueren, K., Buyse, E., De Munter, S., Max, K., & Moens, L. (2009). Further examination of the convergent and discriminant validity of the student-teacher relationship scale. *Infant and Child Development*, 18, 502-520. doi: 10.1002/icd.635
- Driscoll, K. C., & Pianta, R. C. (2010). Banking time in head start: Early efficacy of an intervention designed to promote supportive teacher-child relationships. *Early Education & Development*, 21, 38 - 64. doi: 10.1080/10409280802657449

- Farkas, G., & Beron, K. (2004). The detailed age trajectory of oral vocabulary knowledge: Differences by class and race. *Social Science Research, 33*, 464-497. doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2003.08.001
- Gámez, P. B., & Lesaux, N. K. (2012). The relation between exposure to sophisticated and complex language and early-adolescent english-only and language minority learners' vocabulary. *Child Development, 83*, 1316-1331. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01776.x
- Goodman, R. (2001). Psychometric properties of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*, 1337-1345. doi: 10.1097/00004583-200111000-00015
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development, 72*, 625-638. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00301
- Hawes, D. J., & Dadds, M. R. (2004). Australian data and psychometric properties of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 38*, 644-651. doi: 10.1111/j.1440-1614.2004.01427.x
- Hoff, E. (2006). How social contexts support and shape language development. *Developmental Review, 26*, 55-88. doi: 10.1016/j.dr.2005.11.002
- Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Pianta, R., Bryant, D., Early, D., Clifford, R., et al. (2008). Ready to learn? Children's pre-academic achievement in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*, 27-50. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2007.05.002
- Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling, 6*, 1-55. doi: 10.1080/10705519909540118
- Hughes, J. N. (2011). Longitudinal effects of teacher and student perceptions of teacher-student relationship qualities on academic adjustment. *The Elementary School Journal, 112*, 38-60. doi: 10.1086/660686

- Hughes, J. N. (2012). Teacher–student relationships and school adjustment: Progress and remaining challenges. *Attachment & Human Development, 14*, 319-327. doi: 10.1080/14616734.2012.672288
- Hughes, J. N., Luo, W., Kwok, O. M., & Loyd, L. K. (2008). Teacher-student support, effortful engagement, and achievement: A 3-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*, 1-14. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.100.1.1
- Hughes, J. N., Wu, J.-Y., Kwok, O.-m., Villarreal, V., & Johnson, A. Y. (2012). Indirect effects of child reports of teacher–student relationship on achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 104*, 350-365. doi: 10.1037/a0026339
- Jones, I. (2002). Social relationships, peer collaboration and children's oral language. *Educational Psychology, 22*, 63-73. doi: 10.1080/01443410120101242a
- Jöreskog, K. G. (1970). A general method for analysis of covariance structures. *Biometrika, 57*, 239-251. doi: 10.1093/biomet/57.2.239
- Justice, L. M., Cottone, E. A., Mashburn, A., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2008). Relationships between teachers and preschoolers who are at risk: Contribution of children's language skills, temperamentally based attributes, and gender. *Early Education & Development, 19*, 600-621. doi: 10.1080/10409280802231021
- Kerr, D. C. R., Lunkenheimer, E. S., & Olson, S. L. (2007). Assessment of child problem behaviors by multiple informants: A longitudinal study from preschool to school entry. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 48*, 967-975. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01776.x
- Koomen, H. M. Y., Verschueren, K., van Schooten, E., Jak, S., & Pianta, R. C. (2012). Validating the student-teacher relationship scale: Testing factor structure and measurement invariance across child gender and age in a dutch sample. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*, 215-234. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2011.09.001
- Ladd, G. W. (2006). Peer rejection, aggressive or withdrawn behavior, and psychological maladjustment from ages 5 to 12: An examination of four predictive models. *Child Development, 77*, 822-846. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00905.x

- Ladd, G. W., Buhs, E. S., & Seid, M. (2000). Children's initial sentiments about kindergarten: Is school liking an antecedent of early classroom participation and achievement? *Merrill Palmer Quarterly*, *46*, 255-279. doi: 23093716
- Ladd, G. W., & Burgess, K. B. (2001). Do relational risks and protective factors moderate the linkages between childhood aggression and early psychological and school adjustment? *Child Development*, *72*, 1579-1601. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00366
- Leflot, G., van Lier, P. A. C., Verschueren, K., Onghena, P., & Colpin, H. (2011). Transactional associations among teacher support, peer social preference, and child externalizing behavior: A four-wave longitudinal study. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *40*, 87 - 99. doi: 10.1080/15374416.2011.533409
- Leseman, P. P. M., & De Jong, P. F. (1998). Home literacy: Opportunity, instruction, cooperation and social-emotional quality predicting early reading achievement. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *33*, 294-318. doi: 10.1598/rrq.33.3.3
- Liew, J., Chen, Q., & Hughes, J. N. (2010). Child effortful control, teacher-student relationships, and achievement in academically at-risk children: Additive and interactive effects. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *25*, 51-64. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.07.005
- Lugo-Gil, J., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2008). Family resources and parenting quality: Links to children's cognitive development across the first 3 years. *Child Development*, *79*, 1065-1085. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01176.x
- Maldonado-Carreño, C., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2011). Teacher-child relationships and the development of academic and behavioral skills during elementary school: A within- and between-child analysis. *Child Development*, *82*, 601-616. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01533.x
- Mashburn, A. J., Justice, L. M., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C. (2009). Peer effects on children's language achievement during pre-kindergarten. *Child Development*, *80*, 686-702. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01291.x
- Masten, A. S., & Cicchetti, D. (2010). Developmental cascades. *Development and Psychopathology*, *22*, 491-495. doi:10.1017/S0954579410000222

- McClelland, M. M., Cameron, C. E., Connor, C. M., Farris, C. L., Jewkes, A. M., & Morrison, F. J. (2007). Links between behavioral regulation and preschoolers' literacy, vocabulary, and math skills. *Developmental Psychology, 43*, 947-959. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.43.4.947
- Meehan, B. T., Hughes, J. N., & Cavell, T. A. (2003). Teacher-student relationships as compensatory resources for aggressive children. *Child Development, 74*, 1145-1157. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00598
- Menting, B., Van Lier, P. A. C., & Koot, H. M. (2011). Language skills, peer rejection, and the development of externalizing behavior from kindergarten to fourth grade. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 52*, 72-79. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2010.02279.x
- Mercer, S. H., & DeRosier, M. E. (2008). Teacher preference, peer rejection, and student aggression: A prospective study of transactional influence and independent contributions to emotional adjustment and grades. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*, 661-685. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2008.06.006
- Mercer, S. H., Nellis, L. M., Martínez, R. S., & Kirk, M. (2011). Supporting the students most in need: Academic self-efficacy and perceived teacher support in relation to within-year academic growth. *Journal of School Psychology, 49*, 323-338. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2011.03.006
- Moffitt, T. E. (1993). Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Review, 100*, 674-701. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.100.4.674
- Muthén, L. K., & Muthén, B. O. (1998-2011). Mplus (Version 6.11). Los Angeles: Muthén & Muthén.
- NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (2004). Multiple pathways to early academic achievement. *Harvard Educational Review, 74*, 1-29.
- Nigg, J. T., & Huang-Pollock, C. L. (2003). An early-onset model of the role of executive functions and intelligence in conduct disorder/delinquency. In B. B. Lahey, T. E. Moffitt & A. Caspi (Eds.), *Causes of conduct disorder and juvenile delinquency* (pp. 227-253). New York: The Guilford Press.

- Oades-Sese, G. V., & Li, Y. (2011). Attachment relationships as predictors of language skills for at-risk bilingual preschool children. *Psychology in the Schools, 48*, 707-722. doi: 10.1002/pits.20583
- O'Connor, E., & McCartney, K. (2006). Testing associations between young children's relationships with mothers and teachers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*, 87-98. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.87
- Pearson, P. D., Hiebert, E. H., & Kamil, M. L. (2007). Vocabulary assessment: What we know and what we need to learn. *Reading Research Quarterly, 42*, 282-296. doi: 10.1598/rrq.42.2.4
- Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Burchinal, M. R., Clifford, R. M., Culkin, M. L., Howes, C., Kagan, S. L., et al. (2001). The relation of preschool child-care quality to children's cognitive and social developmental trajectories through second grade. *Child Development, 72*, 1534-1553. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00364
- Pellegrini, A. D., Galda, L., & Flor, D. (1997). Relationships, individual differences, and children's use of literate language. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 67*, 139-152. doi: 10.1111/j.2044-8279.1997.tb01233.x
- Pellegrini, A. D., Galda, L., Flor, D., Bartini, M., & Charak, D. (1997). Close relationships, individual differences, and early literacy learning. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 67*, 409-422. doi:10.1006/jecp.1997.2415
- Pellegrini, A. D., Melhuish, E., Jones, I., Trojanowska, L., & Gilden, R. (2000). Social contexts of learning literate language: The role of varied, familiar, and close peer relationships. *Learning and Individual Differences, 12*, 375-389. doi: 10.1016/S1041-6080(02)00044-4
- Pianta, R. C. (Ed.). (1992). *Beyond the parent: The role of other adults in children's lives*. San Francisco CA US: Jossey-Bass.
- Pianta, R. C. (2001). *Student-teacher relationship scale. Professional manual*. Lutz, Florida: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Pianta, R. C. (2006). Teacher-child relationships and early literacy. *Handbook of early literacy research, 149*.

- Pianta, R. C., Belsky, J., Vandergrift, N., Houts, R., & Morrison, F. J. (2008). Classroom effects on children's achievement trajectories in elementary school. *American Educational Research Journal*, *45*, 365-397. doi: 10.3102/0002831207308230
- Pianta, R. C., & Stuhlman, M. W. (2004a). Conceptualising risk in relational terms: Associations among the quality of child–adult relationships prior to school entry and children’s developmental outcomes in first grade. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *21*, 32-45.
- Pianta, R. C., & Stuhlman, M. W. (2004b). Teacher-child relationships and children's success in the first years of school. *School Psychology Review*, *33*, 444-458.
- Raviv, T., Kessenich, M., & Morrison, F. J. (2004). A mediational model of the association between socioeconomic status and three-year-old language abilities: The role of parenting factors. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *19*, 528-547.  
doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2004.10.007
- Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review on Educational Research*, *81*, 493 - 529.  
doi:10.3102/0034654311421793
- Rothman, S. (2003). An Australian version of the Adapted PPVT-III for use in research  
*Unpublished manuscript*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Rothman, S. (2005). Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. Report on Adapted PPVT-III and Who Am I? *Data Issues Papers No. 2*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Rudasill, K. M., Rimm Kaufman, S. E., Justice, L. M., & Pence, K. (2006). Temperament and language skills as predictors of teacher-child relationship quality in preschool. *Early Education and Development*, *17*, 271-291. doi: 10.1207/s15566935eed1702\_4
- Saft, E. W., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Teachers' perceptions of their relationships with student: Effects of child age, gender, and ethnicity of teachers and children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *16*, 125-141. doi: 10.1521/scpq.16.2.125.18698

- Sameroff, A. J. (2000). Developmental systems and psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology, 12*, 297-312.
- Satorra, A., & Bentler, P. M. (2001). A scaled difference chi-square test statistic for moment structure analysis. *Psychometrika, 66*, 507-514. doi: 10.1007/bf02296192
- Schmitt, M. B., Pentimonti, J. M., & Justice, L. M. (2012). Teacher–child relationships, behavior regulation, and language gain among at-risk preschoolers. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*, 681-699. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2012.04.003
- Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., & Jak, S. (2012). Are boys better off with male and girls with female teachers? A multilevel investigation of measurement invariance and gender match in teacher–student relationship quality. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*, 363-378. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2011.12.002
- Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., Thijs, J. T., & van der Leij, A. (2012). Supporting teachers' relationships with disruptive children: The potential of relationship-focused reflection. *Attachment & Human Development, 14*, 305-318. doi: 10.1080/14616734.2012.672286
- Spira, E. G., Bracken, S. S., & Fischel, J. E. (2005). Predicting improvement after first-grade reading difficulties: The effects of oral language, emergent literacy, and behavior skills. *Developmental Psychology, 41*, 225-234. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.41.1.225
- Spira, E. G., & Fischel, J. E. (2005). The impact of preschool inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity on social and academic development: A review. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 46*, 755-773. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2005.01466.x
- Taylor, C.L., Christensen, D., Lawrence, D., Mitrou, F., & Zubrick, S.R. (2013). Risk factors for children's receptive vocabulary development from four to eight years in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. *PLoS ONE 8*(9). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0073046
- Valiente, C., Lemery-Chalfant, K., Swanson, J., & Reiser, M. (2008). Prediction of children's academic competence from their effortful control, relationships, and classroom participation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*, 67-77. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.100.1.67

Vallotton, C., & Ayoub, C. (2011). Use your words: The role of language in the development of toddlers' self-regulation. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 26*, 169-181.

doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2010.09.002

Verschueren, K., & Koomen, H. M. Y. (2012). Teacher-child relationships from an attachment perspective. *Attachment & Human Development, 14*, 205-211.

doi:10.1080/14616734.2012.672260