



# Teacher assertiveness in the development of students' social competence

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** Social competence in school students has been studied extensively in terms of their being socially competent or not. However, there has been little analysis of how teachers contribute to the development of these skills. This research assesses the influence of teachers' assertiveness on the social competence of their students and on class-group cohesion.

**Method.** The sample consisted of 36 teachers and 302 sixth-year Primary School students. Teachers filled in the *ADCAs* Self-assessment Report on Attitudes and Values in Social Interactions in its *AD-CA-pr* form, and students completed the *AECS* Social Attitudes and Cognitive Strategies report, and form A of the *BULL-S* Inter-Pupil Aggressiveness Assessment Test. A first linear regression analysis took attitudes comprising social competence and social incompetence as dependent variables. Independent variables were self-assertiveness, hetero-assertiveness, the teacher's age and gender, and the student's age and gender, as modulators of the effect. We also used a Generalised Estimating Equation model in which the dependent variable was group cohesion and the independent variables were self-assertiveness, hetero-assertiveness, and age and gender of the teacher.

**Results.** Results showed, on one the hand, that the teacher's hetero-assertiveness affected students' social competence, lessening their dominance (antisocial attitude), and on the other, that both self-assertiveness and hetero-assertiveness had an impact on group cohesion, although this effect was mediated by the gender of the teacher and by the construct itself.

**Discussion and Conclusion.** It is confirmed that teacher assertiveness positively influences the development of students' social competence, and more specifically, that of students who manipulate and take advantage of others for their own benefit and feel superior to them, while increasing cohesion among members of the class. Therefore assertiveness appears to be a desirable interpersonal skill for professional teachers.

**Keywords:** assertiveness, social competence, group cohesion, interpersonal relationships, primary school.

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## El papel de la asertividad docente en el desarrollo de la competencia social de su alumnado

### Resumen

**Introducción.** La competencia social del alumnado ha sido ampliamente estudiada desde la perspectiva de los efectos que produce en el niño ser o no socialmente competente, mientras que ha sido escaso su análisis desde la contribución del maestro a su desarrollo. El objetivo de esta investigación es valorar la influencia de la asertividad del docente en la competencia social de sus alumnos y en la cohesión del grupo-clase.

**Método.** La muestra estuvo constituida por 36 profesores y 302 alumnos de sexto curso de Primaria. Los docentes cumplieron el cuestionario *ADCAs*. Autoinformes de Actitudes y Valores en las Interacciones Sociales, en su forma *ADCA-pr* y los estudiantes el *AECS*. Actitudes y Estrategias Cognitivas Sociales y la forma A del *BULL-S*. Test de Evaluación de la Agresividad entre Escolares. En un primer análisis de regresión lineal se emplearon como variables dependientes las actitudes que comprenden la competencia e incompetencia social. Las variables independientes fueron la autoasertividad, heteroasertividad, edad y sexo del docente, así como la edad y sexo del alumno como moduladoras de dicho efecto. Por otro lado, se empleó un modelo de Estimación de Ecuaciones Generalizadas en el que la variable dependiente fue la cohesión de grupo y las independientes la autoasertividad, heteroasertividad, edad y sexo del docente.

**Resultados.** Los resultados muestran, por un lado, que la heteroasertividad del maestro afecta a la competencia social del alumnado amortiguando su dominancia (actitud antisocial), y por otro, que tanto la autoasertividad como la heteroasertividad influyen en la cohesión del grupo, aunque dicho efecto está mediado por el género del docente y por el propio desarrollo de este constructo.

**Discusión y conclusiones.** Se confirma que la asertividad influye positivamente en el desarrollo de la competencia social de los alumnos, específicamente en la de aquellos que manipulan y se aprovechan de los otros en beneficio propio sintiéndose superiores a ellos, al tiempo que aumenta la cohesión entre los miembros del grupo-clase. Se configura, así, como una competencia interpersonal deseable en el perfil profesional docente.

**Palabras Clave:** Asertividad, competencia social, cohesión del grupo, relaciones interpersonales, primaria.

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## Introduction

Knowledge about social reality, that is to say, about institutions, norms, values, people and the relationships that exist among them and which organize their correct functioning, is key for the integration of the child into society and for his/her preparation to become a socially well-adapted adult. Over the last two decades this reality has changed as a consequence of the influence of social, political, and economic variables, and society has had to undergo many rapid changes. In parallel with this process, and sometimes as a result of it, young people seem to have received a socialization that has not enabled them to cope with such demands. In the search for understanding and adaptation to these circumstances they have been forced to modify a key element for social development, their hierarchy of values.

One of the most recent approaches to the study of values considers them to be the result of this set of variables (Ros, 2001a), in other words, cultural products which as such cognitions facilitate the encounter between the individual and society (Braithwaite & Blamey, 2001). This adjustment has emerged because of the relationship existing between these values and behaviors. From a psychosocial perspective, the importance of values lies there, in their ability to guide and direct individuals' behavior (Pérez, 2009). They are defined, therefore, as "hierarchical beliefs about lifestyles and ways of existence that guide our attitudes and behaviors" (Ros, 2001b, p. 85).

Regardless of their diversity and hierarchical character, social values are universally considered to be desirable. They are one of the most effective instruments in the system to transmit social knowledge (Hernández, 1986), and are aimed at promoting harmonious co-existence in a democratic and plural society. As this objective is one of the four fundamental learning processes around which education should be structured (Delors, 1996), social values take on an enormous importance in this area. Bearing this in mind, and given that school is one of the principal socialization environments, it constitutes a privileged space where values can be learnt and practiced, since making a value one's own necessarily means having experience of it (Ortega & Mínguez, 2001). The classroom is similar in that the relationships among its members are determined by the social competences that they have at their disposal, relationships which feed back not only behaviors but also emotions and thoughts, contributing to

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the creation of the social environment of the class (Bueno & Garrido, 2012). Allen, Weissberg and Hawkins (1989) brought this to light at the beginning of their research into values, when they established their links to social competence in early adolescence. The authors ascertained that social values could mediate in the influence which peers have over the individual, inhibiting or facilitating the accomplishment of behavior, which ultimately may restrain their process of social adaptation.

According to this, we can affirm that both present-day social circumstances and empirical evidence have contributed to the fact that learning of values in school contexts is strictly regulated. However, this regulation, whether it be developed in a transversal manner or with its own curriculum, does not guarantee that pupils will learn take them on board. This objective may be cut short when values intentionally promoted by the school do not coincide with those expressed by the behavior of the teacher, who acts and educates from his/her conception of the world and his/her own value system (Díaz, 2006; Gómez, 2005; Ortega & Mínguez, 2001) taking refuge in the “habit of the island teacher” (Fernández, 1998, p. 38).

The double message idea is especially important when considering that the teacher is a role model for the pupils (Delval & Enesco, 1994; Muñiz & Pérez, 2010), and that observational learning facilitates the acquisition not only of specific patterns of social behavior but also of attitudes and strategies (Rivière, 1992). Specifically, the teacher is considered to be one of the outstanding models in the development of social competence in children (Corredor, Justicia-Arráez, Pichardo, & Justicia, 2013).

Social abilities, assertive behavior and social competence have usually been employed synonymously. Bueno and Garrido (2012) believe that interpersonal abilities are a specific case of social relationships, while recognising that they are equivalent to *social abilities*. Definitions formulated around the latter coincide in conceiving them as learnt behaviors (abilities) which take place in the context of interpersonal (social) relationships, and which are oriented towards achieving specific objectives, and regulated by the specific social rules of cultural and situational contexts.

From an integrated cognitive-behavioral point of view, García and Magaz (2000) defined *assertive behavior* as a kind of behavior or social ability (Caballo, 2005; Gismero, 1996; Pérez, 2000), which constitutes an act of respecting oneself and those with whom one interacts equally. So a person behaves assertively when he/she shows the right social behavior at the right time. When people in that setting value such behavior as suitable, this is referred to as his/her *social competence*, as this is linked to the quality of the accomplishment of the behavior depending on the context (García, Sureda, & Monjas, 2010; Mcloughlin, 2009; Trianes, De la Morena, & Muñoz, 1999). According to this, to the extent to which the assertive person is perceived to be socially competent both terms are considered as synonymous (Roopnarine, 1994; Bueno & Garrido, 2012; Delamater & McNamara, 1991), although the latter concept may have a broader and more open meaning.

Of all the many definitions of social competence that have been put forward, in this paper we adopt the definition developed by Moraleda, González and García-Gallo (1998). These authors created a theoretical model from which they conceived social competence as the expression of certain basic attitudes and specific cognitive processes which will lead to success or failure in social relationships and which, in short, will facilitate or obstruct social adaptation to the environment. In the school setting numerous investigations report that social competence is a key element in pupils' adaptation to the school (Blankemeyer, Flannery, & Vazsonyi, 2002; Ladd, 1990; Monjas & González, 1998; Muñoz, Carreras, & Braza, 2004; Ollendick, Francis, & Baum, 1991), facilitating quality in interpersonal relationships and preventing criminal behavior and aggressive conduct (Corapci, 2008; Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000; Trianes, 1996). Positive links between social competence and some areas of personal development directly involved in interpersonal relationships, such as empathy (Monjas, 2002) or self-control (Barr, Kahn, & Schneider, 2008), have also been observed.

### *Objectives and hypotheses*

At the present time the importance of having adequate social competence for the child's personal and social development is not questioned. However, research still puts more stress on delving into this relationship than on studying factors pertaining to the school context that may influence it.

Although the figure of the teacher has been widely analysed as regards the importance of expectations, empathy, warmth and enthusiasm, leadership, and teaching style (Trianes et al., 1999), knowledge about the effects that his/her social competence may have on students has not been deepened (Muñoz & Jiménez, 1995). The analysis of the primary teacher's contribution to students' social competence, through his/her style in relationships with them, will be the object of this research. In this study we assess his/her contribution on two levels: in the student considered individually, by means of his/her social attitudes, and in the within-class relationships that arise through so-called group cohesion, as this helps “its members to develop values such as feelings of loyalty, self-esteem, confidence, etc.” (Oñate, 1998, p. 549).

In this context, we propose the following *hipotheses*:

H1. Children enrolled in semi-private schools (“*concertados*”, private with some state funding) will have better social attitudes than those enrolled in state schools.

The *teacher's gender* will influence the development of pupils' social attitudes, an assertion which posits that:

H2. Women will favor the development of prosocial attitudes.

H3. Men will promote the development of antisocial and asocial attitudes.

As regards the *teacher's age*, we expect to ascertain that:

H4. Older teachers will nurture prosocial attitudes in students.

H5. Younger teachers will contribute to antisocial and asocial attitudes in students.

As far as the *teacher's assertiveness* is concerned:

H6: Self-assertive teachers will promote prosocial attitudes in their pupils.

H7. Self-assertive teachers will restrain the development of antisocial and asocial attitudes in their pupils.

H8. Hetero-assertive teachers will promote prosocial attitudes in their pupils.

H9. Hetero-assertive teachers will restrain the development of antisocial and asocial attitudes in their pupils.

H10. Assertive teachers will bring about good cohesion among members of the class group.

## Method

### *Participants*

Two teacher-student groups took part in this research. Thirty-six teachers, 15 men (41.7%) and 21 women (58.3%), with a mean age of 45.47 years ( $SD = 10.97$ , range = 24 - 60) took part. Mean contact hours spent with their students was approximately 5 hours ( $SD = 5.39$ , range = 1 - 18.50). A total of 302 pupils from the 6<sup>th</sup> year of Compulsory Primary Education also took part, of whom 148 were boys (49%) and 154 were girls (51%), with a mean age of 11.62 ( $SD = 0.56$ , range = 11 - 14), the majority being 11 years old (41.2%) and 12 years old (55.5%).

Schools were chosen depending on their location, on their socioeconomic and cultural levels, on whether or not they were state-run or semi-private, and if their teachers were willing to collaborate in the study. Bearing in mind these criteria, we selected eight schools situated in the province of Granada, Spain: four in the capital (two located in the center of the city: these were semi-private with students whose socioeconomic level was middle-high or high; and two on the outskirts: these were state-run schools whose students' socioeconomic level was middle-low or low). Of the other four schools, two were located in villages near the capital, and two were situated in villages of the province. These four were all state schools whose students came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

### *Instruments*

*Self-assessment Report on Attitudes and Values in Social Interactions*, ADCAs [*Autoinformes de Actitudes y Valores en las Interacciones Sociales*] (García & Magaz, 2000). This report is to be completed by teachers in its ADCA-Teacher form and attempts to identify their attitudes and values as regards the social relationships they have with their pupils. It is based on the construct of assertiveness, defined by the authors as a “kind of social behavior which constitutes an act of respect in equal measure for oneself and for the persons with whom the interaction is being carried out” (p. 13). To avoid scoring compensation among its components, it is divided into two subscales: the first is *self-assertiveness* (SA), with 20 items and a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .776$ , which measures the degree to which a person respects him/herself; the second is *hetero-assertiveness* (HA), with 15 items and a reliability coefficient



Teacher assertiveness in the development of students' social competence of  $\alpha = .869$ , which measures the degree to which a person respects others. In both subscales participants select one of 4 options: Never or hardly ever; Sometimes; Often; Always or nearly always.

*Social Attitudes and Cognitive Strategies Report [Actitudes y Estrategias Cognitivas Sociales, AECS]* (Moraleda et al., 1998). This questionnaire identifies the variables which facilitate or hinder a person's social adaptation and which shape his/her social competence. These variables, of attitude (Social Attitude) and of thought (Social Thought), are organized in a bipolar structure around social competence. In turn, Social attitudes are divided into three factors which contain others of lower order. So, the prosocial factor, or facilitator of relationships, with a reliability coefficient for this sample of  $\alpha = .8$ , includes (1) Conformity to what is socially correct, with 9 items which value obedience to social rules and norms which facilitate harmonious coexistence and mutual respect; (2) Social sensitivity, with 8 items which assess the individual's tendency to sympathize with the feelings of others; (3) Help and collaboration, with 10 items which measure the tendency to take part in and collaborate in shared tasks; (4) Confidence and firmness in interaction, with 10 items which analyse confidence in one's own capabilities to achieve the objectives of the interaction; (5) Prosocial leadership, with 4 items which appraise the tendency to gather group members around common objectives and to take the initiative. The factor called Antisocial or destructive of relationships, with a reliability coefficient for this sample of  $\alpha = .642$ , encompasses (1) Aggressivity-stubbornness, whose 8 items evaluate the tendency to be violent toward persons or things and to be rigidly tenacious as a form of aggressiveness; (2) Dominance, whose 6 items measure the tendency to dominate other people for one's own benefit, and to manipulate and take advantage of them. Finally, the Antisocial factor or inhibitor of relationships, with a reliability coefficient for this sample of  $\alpha = .562$ , comprises (1) Apathy-reserve, whose 9 items analyse the person's lack of interest in integrating into groups or in participating in their activities, and his/her tendency to appear isolated; (2) Anxiety-shyness, whose 7 items estimate the propensity to be afraid to express oneself, to relate to others, and to defend assertively one's own rights. The Social thought block, which has a similar structure, has three factors linked to Cognitive Style, Social Perception, and the kind of Cognitive Strategies employed to solve social problems. The questionnaire has 137 items, which students complete responding to Likert-type items with seven statements ranging from (1) "This is never true for you" to (7)

“This is always true for you.” In view of the objectives of the study, we only used information concerning Social Attitudes.

*Inter-Pupil Aggressiveness Assessment Test [Test de Evaluación de la Agresividad entre Escolares, BULL-S]* (Cerezo, 2000). This test analyses bullying among schoolchildren from the perspective of different agents that intervene in the classroom while offering information about variables of group character (i.e., sociometrical situation and degree of cohesion). This test has two forms, each having 15 questions. Form A, for the students, has three dimensions: the first, with 4 items, is concerned with the socio-affective structure of the group and with each one of its members; the second and third give information on specific aspects of the aggressor-victim relationship. Form P, for individual teachers, requests them to indicate the situation of their pupils as regards bullying. In this investigation, we have employed form A, making use only of information gathered about group cohesion.

### *Procedure*

After selecting the schools, we contacted the directors to explain the objectives of our study and requested permission to have access to teachers in order to carry it out. The directors met with teachers who wished to take part in the study, informing them about its aims and about what their participation would involve. They were assured of the confidentiality of data gleaned and their use. Once each teaching team had agreed to participate, a time to administer the questionnaires in class was agreed upon, since the researcher was to be present. Teachers were given the ADCA-pr questionnaire and a day was set for handing it in to the researcher.

### *Data analysis*

To examine the influence of social attitudes of the teacher when interacting with his/her students in the development of their social competence, linear regression analysis methods and multivariate analysis of variance were used, as there was more than one dependent variable correlated with one another (Stevens, 2002). As such, student variables included in the social attitude block were selected, with the grouping of the factors proposed in the questionnaire. Age and gender were considered independent variables modulating the this effect together with age, gender and degree of the teacher's SA and HA depending on the num-

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ber of hours spent with his/her pupils. This deliberation, conducted in order to determine the weight of the variables, was due to the fact that teachers interacted with their pupils in class with a varying amount of hours depending on the number and kind of academic subject they taught. To this end, we employed the mean score per hour that the teacher spent with the student. We point out that the SA and HA scores were standardized to a common scale of 1 to 100 so that they were mutually interpretable and comparable. For the teachers' gender variable we used the gender of those who spent most time with the group of students.

Once we had established the normality of the attitude scales by means of the Q-Q plot, we proceeded to determine the parametric statistical models, based on normal assumptions, which would best explain the relationships among the independent variables and the student's social attitude. The analysis of these relationships, since there are several in this study, was carried out through a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), Pillai's Trace ( $V$ ), as this is the most powerful and robust one in detecting differences under a variety of conditions (Field, 2005).

Following a first multivariate model, in which all variables of interest were included, all those which did not display statistically significant relationships were discarded. With those that did reveal such relationships, a new reduced model was established in order to analyse how they behaved individually, that is, how they influenced the dependent variables. For each model we verified statistical assumptions about the homogeneity of covariance matrices using Box's statistical test, for which reason we rejected the hypothesis of equality between covariance matrices if the associated  $p$ -value was less than .05. Finally, goodness of fit was verified by checking for normality of residuals, indicating that if these are distributed along a normal curve the fit will be adequate.

For the purpose of examining the relationship between the social attitude held by the teacher when he/she interacts with his/her students and the cohesion which exists among the latter, several General Estimating Equations (Twisk, 2007) models were adjusted for the cohesion variable (binary variable: 0 – poor or very poor, and 1 – good). In these models, two groups of participants, students and teachers, were considered, as well as an interparticipant effect determined by the group/class to which the student belonged. To correct the interpartic-

ipant effect, through belonging to the same class, derived from the response variable, we used an unstructured covariance matrix, also establishing a significance level of 5%. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19.

## Results

As regards scores on the ADCA-pr questionnaire, used to measure the teacher's attitudes and values in his/her social interactions with his/her students, the mean of standardized scores was 76.7 for SA ( $ST = 12.29$ ) and 57.7 for HA ( $ST = 16.64$ ). There was a moderate correlation between them as the Pearson correlation coefficient was  $r=.521$ . As far as students' scores on the AECS test are concerned, employed to measure the variables which affect the degree of participants' social adaptation to the environment in which they live, descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive measures for the Social Attitude component*

|                          | Factor     | Lower Factor                    | Mean  | <i>ST</i> | Mini-<br>mum | Maxi-<br>mum |
|--------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|-------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| Social Com-<br>petence   | Prosocial  | Conformity                      | 46.24 | 8.08      | 21           | 63           |
|                          |            | Social sensitivity              | 46.00 | 7.23      | 17           | 56           |
|                          |            | Help and collaboration          | 54.74 | 8.83      | 24           | 70           |
|                          |            | Confidence and firmness         | 49.85 | 9.35      | 23           | 70           |
|                          |            | Leadership                      | 18.39 | 4.64      | 5            | 28           |
| Social Incom-<br>petence | Antisocial | Dominance                       | 17.36 | 6.71      | 6            | 39           |
|                          |            | Aggressiveness-<br>stubbornness | 25.61 | 8.01      | 8            | 56           |
|                          | Asocial    | Apathy-reserve                  | 26.51 | 8.04      | 9            | 52           |
|                          |            | Anxiety-shyness                 | 24.99 | 8.05      | 7            | 48           |

We found that there were significant differences in students' social attitudes depending on the kind of school they attended, state or semi-private. A Student's T-test yielded data about equality of means for both samples. For this reason we analysed data without specifying type of school. We therefore analysed two linear regression models for social attitudes, one for each block:

### *Attitude: Social Competence*

This group includes as dependent variables the following factors: Conformity with what is socially correct, Social Sensitivity, Help and collaboration, Confidence and firmness

Teacher assertiveness in the development of students' social competence in interactions, and Prosocial Leadership. Once the degree of correlation amongst these had been established, where Pearson correlations fell between .5 y .7, a multidimensional model was generated in which neither the student's age nor gender, nor the teacher's age, gender, degrees of SA and of HA yeilded a statistically significant association with the Leadership and Confidence and firmness factors, for which reason these dependent variables were excluded from the final model. In this way, the model which best explained what affects the pupil's pro-social attitude (variables of Social Sensitivity, Help and collaboration, and Conformity with what is socially correct) was determined by his/her gender and age ( $V = .027$ ,  $F(3, 297) = 2.705$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In relation to gender, the results of the adjusted regression model (Table 2) revealed that boys tended to be less Socially Sensitive than girls, who showed a lesser degree of Help and collaboration and less Conformity with what is socially correct. Regarding age, it was observed that for each year students' age increased, their degree of Conformity with what is socially correct diminished by 2.11.

Tabla 2. *Regression Model for Social Competence*

| Dependent variable                       | Parameters                        | B      | Standard Error | t      | p    | 95% confidence interval |             |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------|--------|------|-------------------------|-------------|
|  |                                   |        |                |        |      | Lower limit             | Upper limit |
| Social Sensitivity                       | Constant                          | 53.888 | 8.198          | 6.573  | .000 | 37.755                  | 70.020      |
|  | Student's gender, male vs. female | -3.723 | .807           | -4.612 | .000 | -5.311                  | -2.134      |
|  | Students's age                    | -.523  | .707           | -.739  | .461 | -1.914                  | .869        |
| Help and Collaboration                   | Constant                          | 72.381 | 10.159         | 7.125  | .000 | 52.389                  | 92.374      |
|  | Student's gender, male vs. female | -3.177 | 1.000          | -3.176 | .002 | -5.145                  | -1.208      |
|  | Student's age                     | -1.387 | .876           | -1.582 | .115 | -3.111                  | .338        |
| Conformity with what is socially correct | Constant                          | 71.681 | 9.309          | 7.700  | .000 | 53.361                  | 90.000      |
|  | Student's gender, male vs. female | -1.915 | .917           | -2.089 | .038 | -3.719                  | -.111       |
|  | Student's age                     | -2.112 | .803           | -2.630 | .009 | -3.692                  | -.532       |

The model's mathematical assumptions were verified by Box's test ( $Box's M = 10.757$ ,  $F(6, 6.49) = 1.773$ ,  $p = .1$ ) for these factors and the goodness of fit by the analysis of standardized residuals through Q-Q plots.

#### *Attitude: Social Incompetence*

Aggressivness-stubbornness, Dominance, Apathy-reserve, and Anxiety-shyness appeared as indicators of Social Incompetence in the children. To determine the influence of the independent variables on them, and having assured that Pearson correlation coefficients dis-

played values of between .1 y .5, we devised a regression model from which we left out the Agressiveness-stubbornness factor, since no independent variable was seen to be associated with it. Multivariate contrasts for the final model showed that the independent variables which had a statistically significant influence on students' Social Incompetence were: the student's gender ( $V = .70$ ,  $F(3, 294) = 7.346$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the student's age ( $V = .29$ ,  $F(3, 294) = 2.96$ ,  $p < .05$ ); the teacher's gender ( $V = .038$ ,  $F(3, 294) = 3.821$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the teacher's age ( $V = .05$ ,  $F(3, 294) = 5.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as well as the degree of HA in the latter ( $V = .032$ ,  $F(3, 294) = 3.214$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

On analyzing their influence on the dependent variables we found that boys tended to be more Dominant than girls and that their Apathy-reserve levels were also higher than in girls, which was seen to increase in older pupils (1.58 points per year). In the same way, we observed that when students spent more time with a male teacher, their Dominance and Anxiety-reserve scores were lower than the mean score for students who were taught by female teachers. Similarly, as the teacher's age increased, so did the degree of Dominance and of Apathy-reserve. Finally, the higher the teacher's HA, the lower the students' level of Dominance. These results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Regression model for Social Incompetence

| Dependent variable | Parameters                        | B      | Standard error | t      | p    | 95% Confidence interval |             |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------|--------|------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                    |                                   |        |                |        |      | Lower limit             | Upper limit |
| Dominance          | Constant                          | 3.820  | 8.184          | .467   | .641 | -12.287                 | 19.926      |
|                    | Student's gender, male vs. female | 2.504  | .750           | 3.340  | .001 | 1.029                   | 3.980       |
|                    | Teacher's gender, male vs. female | -1.687 | .825           | -2.047 | .042 | -3.310                  | -.065       |
|                    | Student's age                     | .901   | .650           | 1.385  | .167 | -.379                   | 2.181       |
|                    | Teacher's age                     | .194   | .061           | 3.200  | .002 | .075                    | .314        |
|                    | Teacher's HA                      | -.111  | .039           | -2.846 | .005 | -.187                   | -.034       |
|                    | Constant                          | 1.163  | 9.951          | .117   | .907 | -18.421                 | 20.748      |
| Apathy-reserve     | Student's gender, male vs. female | 2.196  | .912           | 2.408  | .017 | .401                    | 3.990       |
|                    | Teacher's gender, male vs. female | -.534  | 1.003          | -.533  | .595 | -2.507                  | 1.439       |
|                    | Student's age                     | 1.588  | .791           | 2.008  | .046 | .032                    | 3.144       |
|                    | Teacher's age                     | .221   | .074           | 2.995  | .003 | .076                    | .367        |
|                    | Teacher's HA                      | -.072  | .047           | -1.525 | .128 | -.165                   | .021        |
|                    | Constant                          | 32.197 | 10.148         | 3.173  | .002 | 12.227                  | 52.168      |

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|---|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|
| Anxiety-shyness   | Student's gender, male vs. female | -1.484 | .930  | -1.596 | .112 | -3.313 | .346  |
|   | Student's gender, male vs. female | -2.652 | 1.022 | -2.594 | .010 | -4.664 | -.640 |
|   | Student's age                     | -.776  | .806  | -.963  | .337 | -2.363 | .811  |
|   | Student's age                     | .146   | .075  | 1.944  | .053 | -.002  | .295  |
|   | Teacher's HA                      | -.055  | .048  | -1.148 | .252 | -.150  | .040  |

Similarly, the mathematical assumptions of the model were checked by Box's test ( $Box's M = 16.677, F(18, 1.77E05) = .908, p = .569$ ) for these factors, and by means of an analysis of standardized residuals through Q-Q plots, normal tendencies for data were demonstrated. Finally, in order to analyse the impact of teacher variables on group Cohesion and for the purpose of avoiding colinearity in the modelling of the data, and as SA and HA are connected, we devised two different models, one for each, adjusted for teacher's age and teacher's gender. The outcomes, displayed in Table 4, show that both age and gender significantly affect group Cohesion. Results indicate that in both models, age and gender have a significant bearing on group Cohesion. It is most likely that this Cohesion is poor or very poor, when on the one hand, the teacher's age goes up, so that the odds of one group having good Cohesion is 1.038 (1/0.964) times smaller for every year that the teacher's age rises ( $OR = .964, p < .0001$ ), and on the other hand, when the teacher is male ( $OR = .001, p < .0001$ , and  $OR = .021, p < .0001$ ).

In the model generated for SA, it was observed that the greater the SA in males, the higher the likelihood of good group Cohesion ( $OR = 1.095, p < .0001$ ). Even so, when the teacher's gender was female, the fact that she had higher levels of SA also raised the likelihood of greater Cohesion, though not in a statistically significant way. Regarding HA, it may be noted that a rise in its level in males significantly improves group Cohesion, such that the higher the HA the more probable it is that group Cohesion is good ( $OR = 1.072, p < .0001$ ). However, its increase in female teachers has negative repercussions on group Cohesion ( $OR = .984, p = .024$ ).

Tabla 4. *Generalised Estimating Equations model for Cohesion*

| <i>B</i> | Standrad Error | Hypothesis contrast | <i>OR</i> | 95% Confidence interval for Wald Exp(B) |
|----------|----------------|---------------------|-----------|---|
|----------|----------------|---------------------|-----------|---|

| Parameters              |        | Wald Chi-Square | df     | p | Epx(B) | Lower limit | Higher limit |
|-------------------------|--------|-----------------|--------|---|--------|-------------|--------------|
| <b>GEE model for SA</b> |        |                 |        |   |        |             |              |
| Age                     | -.037  | .005            | 53.425 | 1 | .000   | .964        | .974         |
| Male vs. female         | -6.872 | .9607           | 51.173 | 1 | .000   | .001        | .007         |
| SA                      | .009   | .0067           | 1.843  | 1 | .175   | 1.009       | 1.022        |
| Gender*AA               | .091   | .0127           | 51.173 | 1 | .000   | 1.095       | 1.122        |
| Constant                | 1.182  |                 |        |   |        |             |              |
| <b>GEE model for HA</b> |        |                 |        |   |        |             |              |
| Age                     | -.037  | .0048           | 60.324 | 1 | .000   | .964        | .973         |
| Male vs. female         | -3.845 | .5462           | 49.554 | 1 | .000   | .021        | .062         |
| HA                      | -.016  | .0072           | 5.104  | 1 | .024   | .984        | .998         |
| Gender*HA               | .069   | .0091           | 57.696 | 1 | .000   | 1.072       | 1.091        |
| Constant                | -.007  |                 |        |   |        |             |              |

\* Reference category for the Cohesion variable: poor or very poor

In both models the residuals varied between -2 and 2, indicating the model's goodness of fit and the suitability of estimations according to the data observed.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Social competence has been widely studied from the pupils' perspective, although not so much from the perspective of teacher-pupil relationships, or more specifically from the role played by the teacher. The proof of this correspondence is to be found in the study of Jennings and DiPrete (2010), who, without explaining the mechanisms through which it occurs, show that teachers influence pupils' social skills and that the variability in their effect lies in the importance that teachers attach to these skills in the child's development. Research involving university lecturers has affirmed the link between the lecturer's personality and his/her ability to act correctly in the classroom, as well as the influence of the lecturer's social competence on students' social competence (Vališová, 2011).

The results of the present study enable us to extend these findings to the area of Primary Education, not only providing evidence for the presence of this relational link but also for the relationships among the variables which shape it. We have been able to ascertain that the teacher's age, gender, self-assertiveness and hetero-assertiveness influence the development of social attitudes in his/her students.



As our data show, teachers' assertive behaviour, considered overall, does not seem to be related significantly to the social attitudes that the children develop. However, when the two constructs are separated we find only that hetero-assertiveness is revealed as an attenuating factor of dominance (anti-social attitude), or, in other words, of pupils' tendency to manipulate and take advantage of others for their own benefit, feeling superior to them. Hypothesis 7, then, referring to self-assertiveness, is not confirmed, while hypothesis 9, which proposes that hetero-assertive teachers restrain the development of anti-social and asocial attitudes in their pupils, is partially backed up. Studies with a wider focus already hinted at the impact of the instructor's socio-emotional aspects on students through their teaching practice (Merchán & González, 2012).

Similarly, males and the younger age of teachers have a statistically significant effect of lowering dominance in pupils, which leads us to reject hypotheses 3 and 5. In these hypotheses the opposite is confirmed: being male and being of a younger age both promote the development of antisocial and asocial attitudes in children. In the same way hypotheses 2, 4, 6 and 8 are rejected, and we point out that none of teacher variables examined in this study (age, gender, self-assertiveness, and hetero-assertiveness) intervened in the development of pro-social attitudes.

In addition, at the group level, results suggest that a correspondence exists between values and social attitudes that the teachers have when interacting with their pupils, and the pupils' social attitudes when interacting with their peers. That is, assertive teachers generate good cohesion among the members of the class group, in line with what was set forth in hypothesis 10. This observation is coherent with the findings of Vališová (2011), which supported the influence of the teacher's social competence on the pupil's competence in terms of his/her ability to manage work groups, to communicate with and cooperate in the group, to discuss and negotiate in non-aggressive ways, to cope with his/her own emotional aspects and with those of others, and his/her ability to perceive the rules governing students' interaction in the classroom, as well as the norms and mutual respect among them. Aspects, all of them, which are part of the practice of any teacher and which entail creating a favourable classroom climate for the development of socio-emotional abilities (Merchán & González, 2012).

Similarly, as regards the group, our data demonstrate the impact of the teacher's gender on the dynamic and social processes occurring in the classroom. So, group cohesion is not favoured when the teacher is male and when his age increases, although he may improve it by optimizing both his self-assertiveness and his hetero-assertiveness. Nevertheless, female teachers with a high level of hetero-assertiveness tend to weaken this cohesion, or, as the case may be, not generate it at all. These gender-related differences may be explained from two angles. On the one hand, in terms of behaviors associated with gender stereotypes as regards the socialization process of the participants. While aggressiveness and competitive behavior are encouraged in boys, girls are taught to put others' needs first and to inhibit their own desires out of deference for others (Inglés *et al.*, 2008). Even the social costs of showing lower or higher levels of assertiveness may be more serious for women than for men because this implies a violation of the feminine gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). What is more, independently of gender, studies on the assertiveness construct point to a curvilinear relation among these variables, suggesting that extreme levels in the manifestation of assertive conduct hinder interpersonal relationships (Ames & Flynn, 2007).

Finally, the surmise that a value which is part of the teacher's scale of values seems to contribute to the pupil making it his/her own without it being explicitly taught, only observed and experienced, may be supported by the results of research such as that carried out by Moraleda *et al.* (1998), by Muñoz and Suárez (2012), or by this paper, by the fact that hypothesis 1 was not supported, bringing to light the irrelevance of the ownership of the school, whether state or semi-private, for the pupils' training in social values. This, in turn, reinforces the concept of the "habit of the island teacher" (Fernández, 1998, p. 38) in the transmission of these values.

If this paper is outstanding in that it is one of the first to emphasize the teacher's influence on the development of social attitudes in his or her pupils, this very fact implies a *limitation* because we are not able to compare and discuss the outcomes with those obtained in previous studies. Besides, we must be cautious with what the results suggest given their limited generalizability due to the smallness of the sample.

In spite of these limitations, results allow us to *conclude* that, effectively, the interactions taking place in the educational context are mediated by the fact that people influence one another mutually and that the teacher's assertive behaviour is one of the components of classroom life that impacts on pupils' interpersonal relationships, and, finally, on the orientation of their social values. In this way, the teacher favors their personal and social development. Assertiveness is shaped, therefore, as an interpersonal competence that is desirable in the profile of a good teacher as, in addition, just like any other skill in social interaction, it contributes to the psychological well-being of teachers and pupils, as well as to training in quality (Talvio, Lonka, Komulainen, Kuusela, & Lintunen, 2013). We propose, then, the need to carry out further investigations in this field and to explore the benefits of personal teacher training. This aspect of emotional education is strongly defended by such authors as Extremera and Fernández (2004) and Merchán and González (2012).

Finally, we would like to point out that the teacher's values and social attitudes which influence those of the pupils have *implications* as much for research into the teaching of social values as for research into strategies which will improve harmonious coexistence and the social climate of the classroom. This opens up the possibility that in programs which aim to curtail abusive behaviour in children, intervention should not be focused solely on the children involved but should also aim to nurture suitable assertive behavior on the part of the teacher.

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