

Lifelong payoff for attentive kindergarten kids

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Attentiveness in kindergarten accurately predicts the development of "work-oriented" skills in school children, according to a new study published by Dr. Linda Pagani, a professor and researcher at the University of Montreal and CHU Sainte-Justine.

Elementary school teachers made observations of attention skills in over a thousand [kindergarten children](#). Then, from grades 1 to 6, homeroom teachers rated how well the children worked both autonomously and with fellow classmates, their levels of self-control and self-confidence, and their ability to follow directions and rules. "For children, the classroom is the workplace, and this is why productive, task-oriented behaviour in that context later translates to the [labour market](#)," Pagani said. "Children who are more likely to work autonomously and harmoniously with fellow classmates, with good self-control and confidence, and who follow directions and rules are more likely to continue such productive behaviors into the adult workplace. In [child psychology](#), we call this the developmental evolution of work-oriented skills, from childhood to adulthood."

All the children attended kindergarten in the poorest neighborhoods of Montreal, and their teachers used a carefully constructed observational scale to score them on their attentiveness skills. Over time, the researchers identified the evolution of three groups of children: those with high, medium, and low classroom engagement. All analyses were reviewed to take into account various explanations for the link that was observed between kindergarten attention and classroom engagement.

"Teachers spend many hours per day in school-related activities and can therefore reliably report on them," Pagani explained. The researchers found that boys, aggressive children, and children with lower [cognitive skills](#) in kindergarten were much more likely to belong to the low trajectory.

"There are important life risks associated with [attention deficits](#) in childhood, which include high-school dropout, unemployment, and problematic substance abuse. Pagani said. "Our findings make a compelling case for early identification and treatment of attention problems, as early remediation represents the least costly form of intervention. Universal approaches to bolstering attention skills in kindergarten might translate into stable and productive pathways toward learning." The researchers noted that the next step would be to undertake further study into how specifically the classroom environment influences children's [attention](#) spans.

More information: The study was published online by the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, (the official publication of the International Society for Research in Child and Adolescent Psychopathology), on January 13, 2011.

Provided by University of Montreal

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