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## Parents' Concepts of the Successful School Child in Seven Western Cultures

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### Abstract

*Although children's school success is a parental goal in most cultures, there is wide cultural variation in the qualities that parents most wish their children to develop for that purpose. A questionnaire contained forty-one child qualities was administered to 757 parents in seven cultural communities in Australia, Italy,*

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*the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted separately within each sample and results revealed both similarities and differences across the seven samples. The factor structures showed considerable similarity: four domains of characteristics (Cognitive Qualities, Social Qualities, Negative temperament, and Good Characters) were identified in each sample as strongly influencing children's success in school. However, parents differed across the seven cultural communities in the importance they attributed to these factors. The results also reveal some culturally unique patterns in parents' concepts of the successful schoolchild; the seven samples were differentiated by distinctive associations of individual qualities around the four common domains. These results offer new insights for incorporating perspectives from other cultures into our own concepts of what qualities are most important for children's success in school, and how educators can be cognizant of differing cultural perspectives represented by the families whose children are their students. © 2020 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

**A**s the most important context for children's learning outside the home, school is a concern for parents around the world. Success in school is not only children's gateway to the future in most societies; it is also a place where children gain a sense of their own competence and form relationships with peers and adults beyond the family. A crucial task of parenting, thus, is to help children develop the personal qualities needed to succeed in school.

Although children's success in school is a transcultural parental goal, there is wide global variation in parents' cultural beliefs, or ethnotheories, about which qualities are most important for success in school—and beyond. These beliefs are in turn embedded in culturally shared ideas about the nature and development of intelligence and competence (LeVine, Miller, Richman, & LeVine, 1996; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Subramanian, 1996). Further, parental ethnotheories constitute a key element in the developmental niche (Super & Harkness, 1986), where they often play a directive role in customary and emerging practices and in the daily settings for child life (Harkness & Super, 1996). Several authors have suggested that there is a general contrast between the mainstream American emphasis on cognitive competence, and a greater focus on social intelligence found in other cultures and some sub-cultures within the United States (Dasen, 1984; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Serpell, 1993; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004.) Relatedly, studies in sub-Saharan African traditional cultures have found that social responsibility appears as a core attribute of “intelligence” (Harkness, Super, Barry, Zeitlin, & Long, 2009; Serpell, 1993). Research in Asian cultures has identified the theme of motivationa “heart and mind for wanting to learn”—as integral to the achievement of success in the acquisition of knowledge or skills (Chao, 1996; Li, 2000; Shapiro & Azuma, 2004; Stevenson & Lee, 1990). Taken together, studies such as these have contributed

to an increasingly detailed understanding of cross-cultural variability in parental ethnotheories that are relevant to the development of children's competence, particularly in the context of school. To our knowledge, however, there has been little research on cross-cultural variability in parental ethnotheories related to children's success in school among the middle-class societies of the Western post-industrial world, countries that are often simply grouped together for contrast to some other locale. Yet, the variation within the industrial West is important not only for the comparative study of educational systems, but also as contexts for understanding family life and child development.

Parents' ideas about what qualities are important for children's success in school, insofar as they are shared within a community of people, constitute cultural models that are elements in even more general ethnotheories about the child, the family, and parenting (Harkness & Super, 2005; Harkness, Super, Ríos Bermúdez, Moscardino, Blom et al., 2010). As such, they also relate in turn to a variety of parenting practices and, ultimately, to children's developmental outcomes (e.g., Stevenson & Lee, 1990). As part of a system of ideas and practices, thus, parents' cultural beliefs about a particular domain—such as success in school—should be consistent with findings of other studies of the same parents, as well as research with parents from similar populations.

In this paper, we examine parents' beliefs about the importance of various child qualities for success in school among groups of middle-class families in seven post-industrial Western societies, chosen to sample the broad East-West and North-South variation within the European continent, as well as the British diaspora: Italy, Spain, Sweden, Poland, the Netherlands, Australia, and the United States. Specifically, we address four questions. First, to what extent do the parents in our samples agree on the importance of various individual qualities for children's success in school? Second, what are the cultural commonalities and differences in the ways that parents conceptualize the relationships among these qualities? Third, how do other factors such as parental gender or education influence parents' ideas? Finally, how much do parents *within* each cultural community agree with each other? The answers to these questions should inform a more general understanding of the role of cultural models in parents' ideas related to children's successful development.

## Methods

**Participants.** Data for the present study were drawn from a larger collaborative project, the International Study of Parents, Children and Schools (ISPCS), carried out in the late 1990s by research teams in the countries listed above (Harkness et al., 2001; Super, Axia, Harkness, Welles-Nyström, Zyllicz et al., 2008). The specific research sites in each country were chosen as largely middle-class urban or suburban communities (and practical for

the local investigators), recognizably belonging to the larger national culture but describable as a specific group. By definition, therefore, the samples are not intended to be statistically representative of the countries by which they are labeled here for convenience. Rather, they were chosen to facilitate the systematic exploration of family functioning and children's transition to school in the context of shared cultural models in identifiably distinct communities. The question of how far one can generalize our results to other populations is beyond the scope of the present research, although some insight can be gained from comparing the results to other studies.

The ISPCS samples at each site consisted of approximately sixty families, divided into cohorts of twelve or more based on the target child's age (6 months, 18 months, 3 years, 4½ years, and 7–8 years) and balanced for sex and birth order (first or later-born). All other demographic characteristics (e.g., marital status, parental education, maternal employment) were left to vary freely as these tend to be integral aspects of different cultural systems. Families were broadly middle class, with one or both parents employed, both parents native-born and native speakers of the local language, and with no major family health problems. The varying logistics of funding and data collection resulted in some variation in the size and composition of the samples for any given measure. The Australian sample consisted of Anglo-Celtic families residing in the Melbourne area, who were recruited through public announcements. The Italian families all resided in Padua, and were recruited through their membership in a parents' civic organization. The research site in the Netherlands was located in the town of "Bloemenheim," between Amsterdam and the Hague; parents were recruited through social networks centered around a neighborhood school. The Polish families were recruited through a school and through personal networks in a town on the outskirts of Warsaw. The Spanish sample families lived in a densely populated district of Seville and were recruited through school and social service and health networks. A community in the suburbs of Stockholm was chosen as the Swedish research site, and parents were recruited through neighborhood networks. The U.S. sample was recruited through schools and personal networks in two areas: central Pennsylvania and northeast Connecticut. Both areas include rural as well as suburban neighborhoods.

As shown in Table 7.1, the parents in the present study had generally completed some post-secondary education, and were employed in the business or professional sectors. However, the Polish and American parents tended to be more educated and their range of variation in education was smaller, whereas the Spanish parents generally had a lower educational level and held jobs with lower occupational prestige, as indexed by the Hollingshead scale. Parents averaged between 35 and 40 years old, and almost all were in two-parent households. Rates of maternal employment outside the home varied among the groups from less than one half to virtually all mothers. For those mothers who were in paid employment, the average was around 30 hours per week for four of the communities (Italy, Spain, Swe-

**Table 7.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Spain</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>USA</i>
Number of parents responding	49	119	132	85	124	108	140
Number of mothers responding	49	60	56	59	65	60	73
Parent's average age							
<i>M</i>	35.3	37.7	37.2	34.2	35.1	37.9	36.2
<i>SD</i>	4.4	5.0	6.0	6.2	4.8	6.0	5.6
Range	27–46	25–51	27–65	23–44	23–53	25–56	26–54
Parent's average education code							
<i>M</i>	5.5	5.4	5.0	6.0	3.8	5.1	5.9
<i>SD</i>	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.7	1.1	1.0
Range	2–7	2–7	2–7	4–7	1–7	2–7	4–7
Parent's average occupation code							
<i>M</i>	6.7	6.5	6.0	6.9	4.5	7.2	7.1
<i>SD</i>	1.9	1.7	2.2	.9	2.6	1.6	1.9
Range	1–9	3–9	1–9	6–8	1–9	2–9	1–9
Percent of mothers employed	75	78.3	51.9	50.0	42.0	94.2	69.0
Hours mothers work per week							
<i>M</i>	16.2	30.4	17.8	28.6	31.9	33.3	30.3
<i>SD</i>	11.5	8.3	7.8	12.0	8.8	8.2	13.3
Range	1–50	12–50	2–32	3–40	15–45	15–60	5–60

*Note.* Education coded as follows: 1 = elementary school (6 years); 2 = intermediate/vocational (usually 4 years); 3 = intermediate/academic; 4 = full secondary/college preparatory; 5 = partial college; 6 = college; 7 = postgraduate.

Parents' occupation level is indexed by the Hollingshead (1975) occupational 9-point occupational scale; sample levels are janitor = 1, cab driver = 2, cook or office clerk = 3, carpenter or receptionist = 4, musician or bookkeeper = 5, librarian or supervisor = 6, nurse or financial manager = 7, engineer or school teacher = 8, physician, CEO, or professor = 9.

den, and the United States), slightly less in the Polish sample, and markedly less in the Dutch and Australian samples. On all these measures, there was enough variability within each sample to test their possible relevance to parents' ideas and practices.

**Procedures.** Parents who responded with interest to the recruitment efforts described above were called by a member of the local research team to check for appropriateness in terms of both the general parameters mentioned above (e.g., employment) and the age of the focal child; the nature and purpose of the study were described. On a subsequent visit the team member explained the specific forms left for them to complete (including the questionnaire used here), obtained informed consent, and made a date to return to collect the forms (and for an interview, not reported here).

**Measures.** A questionnaire called "What qualities are associated with children's success in school?" was developed specifically for the present study. The questionnaire contains a list of forty-one words and phrases that can be used to describe children, for the respondent to rate from 1 to 7

with the highest category indicating “Very important” for school success and the lowest meaning “Very problematic” for school success. A rating of 4, at the mid-point, indicates that the quality is seen as neutral for school success. The descriptors were identified by investigators from the seven research sites as ones commonly used by parents in talking about their own children, beginning with a list generated through earlier comparative research in the Netherlands and the United States (Harkness & Super, 2005; Harkness, Super, & van Tijen, 2000). This list was further elaborated and modified through discussion among the principal investigators at a meeting in the beginning of the project. Since all the investigators were multilingual, the choice of actual words and phrases was arrived at through a process of consultation. The investigators agreed that the meanings of the terms were sufficiently similar across cultural and linguistic groups, although it became evident later that the connotations and valence of a few terms did vary across the samples. Finally, because the ISPCS included a study of temperament using questionnaires based on Thomas and Chess (1977), terms for all nine of their temperament dimensions were also included in the questionnaire.

Altogether, the forty-one terms in the questionnaire covered a wide range of personal qualities, as indicated by a comparison with the “Big Five” personality factors adapted to descriptions of children (Kohnstamm, Halverson, Havill, & Mervielde, 1966). Three of the major categories of the Big Five factors (Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness) were each represented by six terms in our questionnaire; a fourth (Emotional Stability) was represented by five terms; and the last, most obviously relevant factor (Openness to experience, Intelligence) was represented by nine terms. In addition, three terms were related to a sixth factor (Independence) identified by Kohnstamm et al. (1966); one was related to their ninth factor (Rhythmicity of eating, sleeping, etc.); and three did not seem to fit readily in any of their categories.

Parents were instructed to rate each term in relation to its importance (positive or negative) for children’s success in school, keeping in mind that the ratings were supposed to apply to children in general, not their own child in particular.

## Results

**Cultural Similarities and Differences in Ratings of the Forty-One Descriptors.** In general, the qualities that parents across the samples rated most highly for success in school included being able to concentrate well, to pay attention, to understand quickly, being curious, and having a good memory, as well as being happy, enthusiastic, self-confident, and responsible. In contrast, the qualities that parents found most problematic for success in school were being shy, sensitive, emotional, intense, impulsive, and, most of all, distractible. Despite the obvious general similarity in ratings across cultural samples, there is a significant overall effect of Culture

(the seven cultural samples) on mean ratings, as indicated by Wilk's lambda ( $F(246/3575.9) = 15.05, p < .0001$ ) in a multivariate analysis of variance. Subsequent univariate analyses indicate the effect of Culture is highly significant ( $p < .0001$ ) for each of the individual qualities except for Distractible. The differences in mean ratings were generally not large, however, with the median percent of variance accounted for by Culture being about 10% (ranging from less than 3% for Distractible, Concentrates Well, Honest, and Approaches New Situations Easily, to about 36% for Verbal and Cooperative).

In order to characterize the level of agreement between specific groups, the mean ratings for each of the forty-one qualities were correlated for each pair of cultural samples. Pearson correlation coefficients for each pair of samples average .84 and range from .68 to .96; all correlations are significant at the .0001 level. Despite the generally high level of agreement, however, there is some interesting variability in correlations among the different pairs of samples. The highest agreements are found between parents in the Northern European cultures (Sweden and Netherlands,  $r = .91$ ; Sweden and Poland,  $r = .86$ ), and in the two English-speaking samples, (Australia and the United States,  $r = .96$ ). In contrast, the lowest level of agreement is found between Spain and the Northern European samples (Spain and the Netherlands,  $r = .68$ ; Spain with Poland and with Sweden,  $r = .74$ ). About two-thirds of the pair-wise comparisons of correlations indicate significant differences; for example, the .96 correlation cited above is significantly greater than all others.

The implication—that samples which are more similar in terms of cultural heritage (and therefore generally geographically closer) are in closer agreement on the ratings of qualities for success in school—is demonstrated by applying multidimensional scaling methods (Kruskal & Wish, 1978) to the seven-by-seven sample intercorrelation matrix described above (stress = .003 in two dimensions). Results from the scaling were superimposed graphically on a standard map of Europe, anchored in Seville and manipulated by hand to optimize placement of the other points. As shown in Figure 7.1, the five samples from continental Europe spread out into a recognizable pattern, with Spain and Italy in the “south” and Sweden, the Netherlands, and Poland in the “north.” Further, Spain lies to the “west” of Italy, and Sweden and the Netherlands lie to the “west” of Poland. Australia and the United States are placed close together, in the “north” with Sweden and the Netherlands, but to their “west”—curiously, just where Britain, their cultural origin, would be on a true map. Although the match is not perfect (the Netherlands is placed “north” of Sweden), the correlation between the scaled intersample distances based on the correlation of parental ratings, with the actual distances in air miles, for the five European samples is .65 ( $p = .04$ ). This result provides concrete evidence that the obtained differences among the samples, although relatively small compared to the shared covariance, are psychologically and culturally meaningful.

**Figure 7.1. Scaling results for sample similarity (stars) compared to geographic location (ovals).**



Note: AU = Australia, ES = Spain, IT = Italy, NL = The Netherlands, PL = Poland, SW = Sweden, US = United States  
Ovals identify actual location the country; stars indicate the location by MDS.

**Common Factors and Cultural Models.** The analyses presented above show clear variability among the samples in patterns of judgment about child qualities for success in school, but they do not inform us about the underlying cultural models that parents in each sample presumably drew from in rating each of the qualities. A further perspective on cultural similarities and differences in parents' ideas about what child qualities contribute to (or detract from) children's success in school is gained by examining patterns of association (covariation) *among the qualities*. We pursue this question first by using exploratory factor analysis, an appropriate choice since we have no a priori expectations of what the emerging patterns will look like.

Dimensions of meaning for the forty-one descriptor items were extracted by common (exploratory) factor analysis of the item intercorrelations separately for each sample (except Australia which was omitted



from factor analysis due to the small sample size). The number of factors extracted with Eigenvalues greater than one ranged from six to eight. After reviewing the results individually, we decided to standardize on a six-factor solution with orthogonal (Varimax) rotation in order to facilitate comparison and interpretation of the factor structures. The cut-off point of loadings for an item to be included in a factor was set at .32 (indicating a 10% shared variance with the factor), as shown in Tables 7.2A–7.2E. The results indicate both commonalities and culture-specific patterns.

A comparison of the contents of the factors across samples indicates four common factors as identified by “core items” that are shared across at least five of the six samples:

1. Cognitive Competence (Table 7.2A). This factor includes three core items: Pays Attention, Concentrates Well, and Understands Quickly, two of which represent attention management skills that are involved in cognitive performance.
2. Social Competence (Table 7.2B). The factor of social competence is present in all samples, but shares only two core items: Concerned for others, and Sociable, which together capture both the purely social and the pro-social dimensions of sociability.
3. Good Character (Table 7.2C). A factor that we have called “good character” brings together three core items. Obedient and Polite indicate a well-behaved child who will not present management problems to the teacher. Together with a third core item, Honest, these qualities suggest a child who can be relied on for not only good manners but also entrusted with responsibilities for self or others.
4. Difficult Temperament (Table 7.2D). This factor is strongly evident in all samples, as indicated by three core qualities. They include two aspects of temperament indicating behavior dysregulation, which parents may themselves find difficult: Distractible and Impulsive. Added to these characteristics is another quality, Shy, suggesting a tendency toward social inhibition.

A potential fifth factor, Self-Actualization (Table 7.2E), is evident across the six samples but lacks core qualities that are present in at least five. Instead, four qualities (Brave, Enterprising, Leader, and Strong-willed) are found in four of the samples. This factor is particularly important for the Swedish parents, and it is also salient in the U.S. and Polish samples.

The seventeen core items that define the four common factors constitute fewer than half of the total list of forty-one qualities rated by parents in relation to children's success in school. Virtually all the other twenty-four items appear either somewhere on these common factors, on the Self-Actualization factor, or on a sample-specific sixth factor. Furthermore, the relative size of each factor (that is, the variance it accounts for) differs across the samples, as reflected in the order of factors (from 1 to 6) within each

**Table 7.2A. Common Factor Results for Cognitive Competence**

	Netherlands <i>n</i> = 106 factor 2 (18%)	Poland <i>n</i> = 73 factor 1 (34%)	Spain <i>n</i> = 113 factor 2 (19%)	Sweden <i>n</i> = 83 factor 3 (15%)	USA <i>n</i> = 115 factor 1 (23%)
Italy <i>n</i> = 119 factor 5 (14%)					
<b>attention</b> .45 (concentrates .36)	<b>attention</b> .73 concentrates .61	<b>attention</b> .74 concentrates .79	<b>attention</b> .65 concentrates .50	<b>attention</b> .64 concentrates .47	<b>attention</b> .72 concentrates .68
<b>understand</b> .61 memory .53 clever .45	<b>understands</b> .62 memory .56 clever .59 (curious .38)	<b>understands</b> .82 memory .79 clever .80 curious .74 active .63 cooperative .48 (enterprising .41) (enthusiastic .35)	<b>understands</b> .71 (memory .40) curious .48 cautious .45 (enthusiastic .41) happy .40 leader .34 persistent .45	<b>understands</b> .59 memory .64 (clever .36) (adaptable .42) calm .57 even-temper .47 (independent .35)	<b>understands</b> .76 clever .36 (curious .38) calm .57 (concern .40) cooperative .74 (enthusiastic .49) even-temper .55 independent .58 verbal .59
intense .53	confident .45 even temper .40 (independent .37)	happy .64 honest .47 inventive .47 persistent .74 polite .69 responsible .52 (verbal .35)			

Note: Bolded items are core items for common factors, and constitute the summary scales. Numbers following items are factor loadings. Factor number in row 2 indicate order of extraction (after rotation), and figures in parentheses are percent of common variance (same for Tables 7.2A–7.2E).

**Table 7.2B. Common Factor Results for Social Competence**

	Netherlands n = 106 factor 6 (14%)	Poland n = 73 factor 4 (12%)	Spain n = 113 factor 5 (10%)	Sweden n = 83 factor 2 (16%)	USA n = 115 factor 6 (13%)
Italy n = 119 factor 3 (18%)					
<b>concern</b> .42	<b>concerned</b> .69	<b>concerned</b> .54	<b>concerned</b> .55	<b>concerned</b> .70	<b>concerned</b> .62
<b>(social)</b> .35)	<b>social</b> .69	<b>social</b> .64	<b>social</b> .57	<b>social</b> .64	<b>social</b> .62
approach .49	(happy) .35	athletic .52	enthusiastic .51	cooperative .54	(concentrates) .43)
cooperative .42	(honest) .38)	(inventive) .44)	(happy) .34)	enthusiastic .41	enthusiastic .69
confident .41	independent .48	open .59	(polite) .35)	(happy) .41)	happy .65
happy .47	open .35	sweet .66		(honest) .40)	(memory) -.44)
independent .38	responsible .35			open .71	
inventive .52	verbal .32			responsible .37	
open .57				sweet .49	
regular -.36					
(honest) .50)					

**Table 7.2.C. Common Factor Results for Difficult Temperament**

	Netherlands n = 106 factor 1 (24%)	Poland n = 73 factor 6 (12%)	Spain n = 113 factor 3 (18%)	Sweden n = 83 factor 5 (14%)	USA n = 115 factor 5 (14%)	
<b>Italy</b> n = 119 factor 2 (18%)	<b>distraction</b> .60 <b>shy</b> .62 <b>impulsive</b> .72	<b>distraction</b> .74 <b>shy</b> .72 <b>impulsive</b> .52 <b>intense</b> .45 <b>sensitive</b> .65 <b>emotional</b> .64 cautious .66 cooperative .36 modest .46 sweet .64 open .36	<b>distraction</b> .77 <b>shy</b> .73 <b>impulsive</b> .59 <b>intense</b> .59  (honest -.35) regular .65	<b>distraction</b> .44 <b>shy</b> .52 <b>impulsive</b> .45 <b>intense</b> .45 <b>sensitive</b> .38 <b>emotional</b> .57 (adaptable .42) athletic .40 (concern .45) cooperative .46	<b>distraction</b> .61 <b>shy</b> .76 (impulsive .42) <b>intense</b> .54 <b>sensitive</b> .56 <b>emotional</b> .41 cautious .52 modest .48	<b>distraction</b> .50 <b>shy</b> .55 <b>impulsive</b> .54 <b>intense</b> .60 (sensitive .37)  active .73 cautious .65 curious -.47 modest .45 (polite .44)

**Table 7.2D. Common Factor Results for Good Character**

	Italy n = 119 factor 1 (24%)	Netherlands n = 106 factor 4 (15%)	Poland n = 73 factor 3 (13%)	Spain n = 113 factor 1 (31%)	Sweden n = 83 factor 4 (14%)	USA n = 115 factor 4 (16%)
<b>obedient</b> .48		<b>obedient</b> .68	<b>obedient</b> .46	<b>obedient</b> .56	<b>obedient</b> .73	<b>obedient</b> .54
<b>honest</b> .52		<b>honest</b> .58	( <b>honest</b> .41)	<b>honest</b> .68	<b>honest</b> .44	<b>polite</b> .59
<b>polite</b> .62		<b>polite</b> .67	(responsible .47)	<b>polite</b> .66	<b>polite</b> .70	responsible .60
responsible .43		(concern .40)	calm .59	responsible .59	(responsible .36)	adaptable .66
athletic .37		(confident .37)	(concern .44)	active .50	adaptable .76	approach .49
brave .53		regular .58	cautious .65	clever .59	athletic .36	(brave .38)
calm .35			(even temper .36)	(concern .37)	(sweet .34)	confident .55
cautious .61			modest .66	confident .62		regular .48
modest .51			(sweet .34)	(cooperative .34)		
sweet .52				enterprising .67		
				memory .57		
				open .56		
				sweet .60		

**Table 7.2E. Factor Results for Self-Actualization**

	Netherlands n = 106 factor 5 (14%)	Poland n = 73 factor 2 (14%)	Spain n = 113 factor 6 (8%)	Sweden n = 83 factor 1 (33%)	USA n = 115 factor 2 (17%)
Italy n = 119 factor 4 (16%)					
<b>enterprising .52</b>		<b>enterprising .43</b>	<b>brave .58</b>	<b>brave .59</b>	<b>brave .42</b>
<b>leader .56</b>	<b>leader .55</b>	<b>strong will .71</b> (concern .39) (curious .37) emotional .39 enthusiastic .57 (even temper .35) independent .41 (intense .40) (confident .49) verbal .63	<b>strong will .56</b>	<b>leader .59</b>	<b>enterprising .69</b>
<b>strong will .45</b>				<b>strong will .66</b> active .65 approach .53 (clever .44) confident .67 curious .79 (emotional .38) (enthusiastic .40) impulsive .58 independent .61 (intense .44) inventive .62 (memory .37) persistent .47 (responsible .34) verbal .76	<b>leader .48</b>
enthusiastic .51	(adaptable .39) athletic .38 approach .44 calm .37 (intense .39) inventive .51 persistent .54				athletic .44 (clever .36) (concern .36) honest .39 inventive .59 (modest .40) open .60 sensitive .50
even temper .39					
sociable .39					

sample. Thus, although there was moderate agreement across the samples about which qualities are (and are not) related to each of the four common factors, the remaining differences among them can be seen as evidence of cultural models unique to each sample. Convergent evidence for the meaning and validity of these cultural patterns is available from other research on the same samples and other similar ones, as discussed in the following sections. Of particular note is the similarity of the present results to the ideas of the “ideal student” held by teachers in five of the same communities (Harkness, Blom, Oliva, Moscardino, Zylicz, Ríos Bermúdez, et al., 2007).

**The United States: The Primacy of Cognition and Self-Actualization.** Cognitive Competence is the first factor in the U.S. sample, accounting for more of the variance and, relatedly, including more qualities, than does this factor in all other samples except the Polish sample. The inclusion in this factor of the qualities Calm, Cooperative, Even-tempered, and Concerned for Others evokes the image of a well-regulated child, while the qualities Curious, Enthusiastic, Independent, and Verbal add a dimension of openness to experience.

The primacy of cognitive development as a theme for American middle-class parents, as indicated in the present study, should come as no surprise to either parents or students of parenting and child development in the United States—in fact, the importance of early stimulation for adequate cognitive development is one of the cornerstones of U.S. “expert” advice for parents (Harkness et al., 2007). The American parents in our other research seemed to have learned this lesson well. In an earlier, two-sample comparative study, for example, we found U.S. parents described their young children as “smart” more than twice as frequently as did the Dutch parents (Harkness, Super, & van Tijen, 2000). The same pattern shows up again in our six-culture comparison of parents’ free descriptions of their children: compared to all the other samples (Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden), the U.S. parents most often described their children as intelligent or cognitively advanced (Harkness et al., 2010). The U.S. middle-class preoccupation with cognitive development is evident even in early infancy. U.S. mothers of 2-month-old infants, in a separate cross-cultural study, uniquely highlighted themes and practices of childrearing focused cognitive processing and the stimulation of development (Harkness et al., 2007).

Teachers in the parallel U. S. sample (Harkness, Blom, et al., 2007, p. 127) emphasized the importance of “high motivation, . . . a sense of excitement, [and] engagement in a mutually satisfying process.” The U.S. parents’ inclusion of Cooperative, Curious, Enthusiastic, and Independent on the Cognitive Competence factor indicates they share the teachers’ idea of a happy, busy, successful student.

**Poland: Entrepreneurship Versus Traditionality.** The Cognitive factor is by far the most important factor in the Polish sample, accounting for 34% of the common variance. As in the U.S. sample, this factor includes a

group of qualities describing a child who is a pleasure to have in the classroom due to being cooperative and even-tempered; but the Polish factor also pulls in qualities that tend to be loaded on the Good character factor in other samples, notably Polite and Responsible. As if in counterpoint to these traditional values, the Polish Cognitive Competence factor also includes items suggesting an outgoing, entrepreneurial spirit (Curious, Active, Enterprising, Inventive, and Persistent)—qualities that became more highly valued in Poland's post-Communist environment.

This combination of traditional and entrepreneurial qualities in the Polish Cognitive Competence factor is also found in the study of teachers from the same town (Harkness, Blom, et al., 2007). Two opposing models were evident in their interviews, as the authors of that study described:

One is embedded in the previous collectivistic and strictly social hierarchy-based treatment of the children; the other, emerging model is oriented to encouraging independence, curiosity, and proactive learning. The latter approach perceives the ideal student—as stated by one of our interviewees—as a child who “will be open-minded and courageous in his or her activities. Formerly it was emphasized that the student had to be well-behaved, concerned for others, and silent—which would make the child become a loser in the current world” (p. 123).

Another teacher, who espoused the more traditional view, expressed her view of the ideal student as “a compliant child who reacts to my voice. He must know when to be focused and calm, and when he is allowed to play. Today, children do not have a sense of respect in front of teachers—neither the teacher nor what she says is regarded as ‘holy’ anymore” (p. 124).

**Italy: The Importance of Social and Emotional Intelligence.** In contrast to the U.S. and Polish focus on cognitive competence, the Italian factors indicate a stronger concern with social and emotional qualities that enable children to succeed in school and beyond. Good character, the first factor (accounting for 24% of the common variance) is joined by the third and fourth factors, Social Competence and Self-actualization, in a cluster that together suggest the image of a creative, lively child who can take initiatives and approach new situations with confidence. Thus, the Good Character factor includes Athletic, Brave, and Calm; the Social Competence factor lists Approaches New Situations easily, Confident, Independent, Inventive, and Open, as well as Cooperative; and the Self-actualization factor likewise includes Enterprising, Strong-willed, Enthusiastic, Sociable, and Even-tempered.

The salience of these socio-emotional qualities for the Italian parents is also reflected in an analysis of the same parents' free descriptions of their children (Harkness & Super, 2005). In contrast to the U.S. parents' emphasis on cognitive competence, the Italian parents “rarely described



their children as intelligent and never characterized them as cognitively advanced. Instead, these parents talked about their children as being easy, even-tempered, well-balanced, and *simpatico*.” (Harkness & Super, 2005, p. 73). Another analysis of children’s temperament, focusing on the parents of three and four-year-old children from the same sample, highlighted the importance of social competence—especially being able to move easily into new social situations—as a core attribute related to how “difficult” the child was perceived to be (Harkness, Super, Moscardino, Rha, Blom, Huitrón, et al., 2007). Likewise, an emphasis on socio-emotional learning in the context of close emotional relationships was found for a different sample of Italian parents in a cross-cultural study of parental ethnotheories and infant development (Harkness et al., 2007).

Italian teachers from the parallel study also “emphasized children’s personal and social characteristics in terms of . . . independence, creativity, good social skills. . . . Although skills such as attention, persistence, and intelligence were seen as contributing to a child’s success in school, . . . teachers appreciated those children who were able to engage their classmates, share ideas, and collaborate during group activities” (Harkness, Blom, et al., 2007, p. 121). Like the Italian parents, their children’s teachers “valued liveliness (*vivacità*) as related to both intellectual and behavioral dimensions” (p. 120).

**Spain: Good Character as the Key to Success.** As in the Italian sample, Good Character is the first factor in the Spanish sample. The Spanish version of this factor, however, controls even more of the common variance (31%) than it does in the Italian sample. Despite their similarity in ranking, the content of the Good Character factor varies considerably between the two samples, with only one shared item (Sweet) beyond the core items. The Spanish Good Character factor is distinctive in combining cognitive competence (Clever, Good memory) with other social qualities suggesting an active, outgoing child (Active, Adaptable, Confident, Enterprising, Open, Sweet). Similar social qualities appear again in the second factor, Cognitive Competence, suggesting a close link between cognitive and social skills. The theme of social competence is further elaborated in a unique Spanish fourth factor that includes Approaches new situations easily, Calm, Independent, and Inventive—again evoking an image of a well-regulated child who can move easily into the wider social environment, a child “with whom you can go anywhere—he knows how to comport himself,” as one Spanish mother put it.

These characteristics are also evident in the Spanish parents’ free descriptions of their children, where words and phrases categorized as “good character” and “socially mature” were among the most frequent descriptors, a unique cultural pattern in this study (Harkness & Super, 2005). The Spanish emphasis on social competence as an important skill is also evident in the temperament study cited above (Super, Axia, Harkness, Welles-Nyström, Zylicz, Ríos Bermúdez, et al., 2008), where the Spanish

parents of a “difficult” four-year-old child described her as shy in public while demanding and “capricious” with her parents at home. As a positive, however, both parents noted that she would willingly sing and dance the traditional “Sevillana” dances for them—evidence of growing competence in the performative aspects of successful development. Likewise, Spanish parents of 2-month-old infants emphasized the idea of development in the context of a close network of social relationships with family and friends (Harkness et al., 2007).

The Spanish teachers, like those in Poland, were reported to be acutely aware of the educational aspects of social and political change (Harkness, Blom, et al., 2007). The traditional approach emphasized “good habits in school such as cleanliness, order, and spending time on both work and play” (p. 125), a picture that has clear connections to the parents’ emphasis on Good Character. At the same time, the newer educational focus—attending to student motivation and interest—also expects the ideal student to be “organized, persevering, responsible, and well-behaved” (p. 126). The thread of self-regulated, good behavior continues to underlie teachers’ as well as parents’ expectations for school success.

**The Netherlands: Temperament and Self-Determination.** The Dutch sample is unique in giving more weight to Difficult Temperament than to any other factor, including all six of the core qualities of Difficult Temperament—Distractible, Emotional, Impulsive, Sensitive, Intense, and Shy. Like the Swedish and U.S. samples, the Dutch Difficult Temperament factor also includes Cautious, but unlike them, it also includes Cooperative, Modest, and Sweet. Although these qualities do not ordinarily evoke the image of a “difficult child”—quite the opposite, in fact—such qualities were seen by some Dutch parents as potentially disadvantageous for children who, by being *too* agreeable, might end up being pushed around by others. Thus, the inclusion of these qualities in the Difficult Temperament factor for the Dutch parents may index those qualities that were considered unhelpful for success in school (and beyond). Support for this interpretation comes from a unique Dutch factor (the third factor) that includes qualities that parents often used approvingly in describing their own children: Active, Clever, Curious, Enterprising, Enthusiastic, Happy, and Strong-willed. Together, these two factors evoke an image of the successful child who is not overly sensitive, intense, shy, or even cooperative—but rather one who is positive in mood and eager to explore the world around; a child who can stand on her own two feet and make her own choices without being too influenced by others because, as many mothers pronounced with satisfaction, “She knows exactly what she wants.”

This combination of qualities is also in evidence in Dutch teachers’ concepts of the “ideal student” (Harkness, Blom, et al., 2007). As one teacher described such a child: “Very spontaneous, and child that is open to new things. A child that can nicely work independently. That’s an ideal picture, a child who does what you say, but is also spontaneous. Also brings his own

contribution. A happy child, who picks things up easily. Children who are not afraid of failing” (p. 122).

This well-functioning school child depended in turn, according to both Dutch parents and teachers, on a regular, not over-stimulating environment including plenty of rest, a pattern that has repeatedly emerged in our research (Super, Harkness, van Tijen, van der Vlugt, Dykstra, & Fintelman, 1996; Harkness Super, Moscardino, Rha, Blom, Huitrón, et al., 2007). Such a child might embody qualities that the Dutch parents often referred to approvingly in free descriptions of their children, including being agreeable, enjoying life, having a long attention span and a regular daily rhythm. Setting up a proper environment in order to achieve these developmental goals was evident in Dutch mothers' descriptions of caretaking ideas and practices from early infancy (Harkness et al., 2007).

**Sweden: The Child as a Natural Being.** Self-actualization dominates the Swedish factor structure, controlling fully 33% of common variance. In fact, Self-actualization could be seen as the *only* important Swedish factor as unlike in the other samples, the next factor controls only half the common variance of the first. The Swedish Self-actualization factor pulls in a long list of qualities, including ones related to independence (Self-confident and Independent), persistence, and openness to experience (Approaches new situations easily, Curious, and Inventive), in addition to the core qualities (Brave, Enterprising, Leader, and Strong-willed). The inclusion of Verbal, Clever, and Good memory adds a cognitive theme to this dimension. The quality Impulsive, generally found in the Difficult Temperament factor (where it is also loaded, but more weakly, in the Swedish sample), appears here along with Active, a theme that is further elaborated in the second factor, Social Competence, which features the qualities Cooperative, Enthusiastic, Open, Responsible, and Sweet.

The theme of Self-Actualization—even assertiveness—was unexpected in the Swedish sample, as parents in this group generally did not express enthusiasm about children with these qualities, apparently preferring instead children who were agreeable, happy, and did not make too many demands on their busy parents. In the temperament study (Super, Axia, et al., 2008), for example, the two dimensions of temperament that were significantly correlated with global Difficulty ratings were Mood and Persistence. Although the Swedish parents tended to rate their children overall as much less “difficult” than did parents from all the other samples, the parents of a relatively “difficult” child complained of her clinginess and demands for attention when being dropped off at daycare. Swedish parents' free descriptions of their children also highlighted qualities of a “low-maintenance” child—one who was easy, well-balanced, even-tempered, secure, persistent, and above all, happy (Harkness & Super, 2005). Thus, the dominance of the Self-actualization factor in the present study seems paradoxical. Some insight into this apparent paradox may be gained, however, from consideration of the Swedish cultural model of the child as a free, natural being,

unconstrained by the conventions of adult life, as depicted in Aronsson and Sandin's (1996) reflections on the meaning of the ubiquitous Sun Match Boy whose carefree image appeared on match boxes the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. If this is true, then it may be the case that what these Swedish parents wanted for their children included two opposing types: the agreeable, cooperative child, and the unfettered free-spirited child. Interestingly, however, two key qualities were common to both: happiness, and independence.

### **Effects of Parental Characteristics and Other Possible Confounds.**

An important concern in cross-cultural research is the possible confounding effects of general dimensions of variability such as respondents' age, gender, and socioeconomic characteristics. Systematic analyses were therefore carried out to evaluate the differences among the cultural samples while accounting for the potential influence of parental characteristics on the ratings. In addition, we examined the results for possible influence of characteristics of the focal child for this study (age, gender, and birth order), even though the present questionnaire was explicitly about desirable qualities for school in general and did not reference the focal study child.

First, the multivariate analysis of variance presented at the beginning of the Results section was repeated, using scores on the four common factors as dependent variables. Not surprisingly, the same picture emerged: the combined factors are, overall, significantly affected by Culture ( $F = 13.47$ ,  $df = 24/2275.8$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Univariate analyses of variance revealed that the means differed significantly among the seven communities on each of the common factors (see Table 7.3, which also presents significant pair-wise comparisons, using Tukey's method of controlling the maximum experiment-wise error rate). The effect size  $\eta^2$  (percent of variance explained) of Culture was large in magnitude (Cohen, 1988) on the Cognitive, Social, and Character common factors (Table 7.3). For Difficult Temperament, on the other hand, the effect of Culture was much smaller, indicating greater agreement among groups on its importance.

This analysis was then repeated, but with the parent's age, gender, and educational level, and the focal child's age, gender, and birth order entered *first* as covariates (a procedure that biases strongly against finding significant Culture effects, as any shared variance is allocated to the other factors). Wilks' criterion ( $\lambda$ ) indicates that the combined common factors continued to be significantly affected by Culture ( $p < .0001$ ), as well as three of the background measures (parent's gender,  $p = .001$ ; parent's education,  $p = .008$ , and child's gender,  $p = .001$ ). The cultural effect on each of the four common factors, separately, remains essentially the same, with some reduction for the Social factor ( $\eta^2 = .13, .08, .12$ , and  $.04$ ; compare right-hand column of Table 7.3).

Subsequent univariate analysis of variance on each common factor with Culture as the independent variable and the three parent and three child characteristics as covariates was then conducted; several effects of small to

**Table 7.3. Means (SDs), ANOVA Results, and Post Hoc Comparisons for Four Common Factors**

	Australia	Italy	Netherlands	Poland	Spain	Sweden	USA	F for Culture	$\eta^2$ for Culture
Cognitive competence	<sub>d</sub> 5.81 (.69)	<sub>ab</sub> 6.40 (.50)	<sub>c</sub> 6.13 (.71)	<sub>ab</sub> 6.51 (.76)	<sub>a</sub> 6.53 (.51)	<sub>bc</sub> 6.20 (.73)	<sub>d</sub> 5.85 (.67)	18.56***	.14
Social competence	<sub>ab</sub> 5.93 (.65)	<sub>ab</sub> 6.01 (.75)	<sub>c</sub> 5.29 (1.06)	<sub>bc</sub> 5.52 (.93)	<sub>a</sub> 6.19 (.85)	<sub>b</sub> 5.64 (.96)	<sub>bc</sub> 5.38 (.98)	16.73***	.12
Good character	<sub>b</sub> 5.77 (.79)	<sub>b</sub> 5.84 (.68)	<sub>c</sub> 5.33 (.83)	<sub>ab</sub> 5.74 (.89)	<sub>a</sub> 6.16 (.72)	<sub>c</sub> 5.34 (.81)	<sub>b</sub> 5.87 (.67)	18.29***	.13
Difficult temperament	<sub>a</sub> 3.38 (.71)	<sub>a</sub> 3.39 (.74)	<sub>a</sub> 3.40 (.78)	<sub>b</sub> 2.79 (1.05)	<sub>ab</sub> 3.19 (.90)	<sub>a</sub> 3.33 (.90)	<sub>a</sub> 3.39 (.83)	3.51**	.05

Note. Means with different subscript are significantly different at  $p < .05$  level.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 7.4. Effect of Parental and Child Characteristics on the Four Common Factors**

<i>Common factor</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Means</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta^2$
Cognitive competence	Parent's gender	$M_{\text{mothers}} = 6.27$ $M_{\text{fathers}} = 6.13$	6.35	1,545	.01	.01
Social	Child's age	$M_{6\text{mos}} = 5.79$ $M_{18\text{mos}} = 5.70$ $M_{3\text{yrs}} = 5.56$ $M_{5\text{yrs}} = 5.91$ $M_{7\text{yrs}} = 5.65$	2.81	4,544	.03	.02
Good character	Parent's gender	$M_{\text{mothers}} = 5.83$ $M_{\text{fathers}} = 5.66$	6.19	1,535	.01	.01
	Child's gender	$M_{\text{female}} = 5.66$ $M_{\text{male}} = 5.82$	6.72	1,535	.01	.004
Difficult temperament	Child's gender	$M_{\text{female}} = 3.38$ $M_{\text{male}} = 3.61$	10.72	1,533	.001	.02
	Parent's education	$M_{1\text{-low}} = 4.72$ $M_2 = 3.50$ $M_3 = 3.18$ $M_4 = 3.22$ $M_5 = 3.47$ $M_6 = 3.23$ $M_{7\text{-high}} = 3.14$	4.02	6,533	.0006	.04

medium size were found. Mothers (compared to fathers) rated both Cognitive Competence and Good Character as more important to school success (see Table 7.4). The Social factor was seen as especially important by parents of focal children around 5 years old, that is, near school entry age in most of the samples. Parents in families where the focal child was female (compared to male) rated Difficult temperament as more problematic, and Good Character as less important for school. Finally, more educated parents tended to rate Difficult Temperament as more problematic. Overall, however, these background measures are much less powerful than Culture in their effect on Cognitive Competence, Social Competence, and Good Character; for Difficult Temperament, they are roughly equivalent in power. All considered, a substantial portion of the variance remains unexplained, but we lack other measures, such as personality or personal experience, that might be involved.

In sum, we found modest relationships between the qualities ratings, on the one hand, and standard demographic measures on the other. Most of these are sensible at face value (e.g., mothers see Good Character as slightly more important than fathers). Most importantly, however, it is evident that whatever sample differences there may be in these demographic factors, they do not lie behind the much larger effects of Culture.

**Table 7.5. Results from Consensus Analysis**

	Site						
	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Spain</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>USA</i>
% Variance explained by the 1st factor	42.7	46.0	59.4	64.5	46.0	47.6	60.8
Ratio of 1st to 2nd eigenvalue	2.47	3.96	8.02	8.19	4.96	5.08	7.95
% of negative loadings on 1st factor	10.3	2.5	4.5	3.5	1.6	7.4	2.9
% of loadings (+/– .5 or higher) on the 2nd factor	31.0	12.6	5.4	8.2	8.1	10.2	7.1

### Consensus Among Parents Within Each Cultural Community.

Finally, we carried out a consensus analysis in order to assess the level of agreement about the cultural models within each sample, as indicated by our previous analyses—in other words, the extent to which parents in each group agreed with each other about the relationships among the various child qualities, specifically their patterns of co-variation. Consensus analysis is in essence a principal components of respondents (parents) rather than variables (the forty-one child quality ratings). Conventional principal components analysis provides a direct examination of the hypothesis that a set of scale items (variables) constitutes a cohesive measure of a latent construct. In contrast, for the consensus analysis used here, the “items” are the parent respondents and the latent construct in question is a predefined group with a (culturally) shared understanding of the covariation of qualities that lead to a child’s success in school. In other words, the results of the consensus analysis show to what extent each participant’s responses covary with those of the rest of the sample. The suggested standard for cultural consensus is a single, dominant factor, as measured by the following criteria: (1) The first factor accounts for 50% or more of the variance; (2) The ratio of the first eigenvalue to the second eigenvalue is at least 3 and preferably greater than 5; (3) There are no (or very few) negative loadings on the first factor; and (4) There are no (or very few) high loadings (+/– .50 or higher) on the second factor (Handwerker, 2002; Romney, Weller, & Batchelder, 1986).

For each of the seven samples, a principal components (consensus) analysis was performed on the similarity matrix of subjects, and two factors were retained. As shown in Table 7.5, the Dutch, Polish, and U.S. samples meet the first criterion (proportion of variance accounted for by factor 1), while all the others (except possibly Australia) are close. The Dutch, Polish, Swedish and U.S. samples yield Eigenvalue ratios that meet the strong version of the second criterion (5:1); the Spanish and Italian samples meet the

weaker version (3:1). For the third criterion (percent of negative loadings on the first factor), the Spanish, Italian, and U.S. samples are very low (indicating high consensus), with the Swedish and especially the Australian samples showing considerably more negative loadings, while the Netherlands and Poland are at an intermediate level. For the fourth criterion, Australia shows loadings of almost one-third on the second factor, again indicating lower consensus. Overall, we can conclude that there is moderate to high cultural consensus among members of each cultural sample except for Australia.

**Summary and Conclusions.** In summary, these results indicate both similarities and differences across the seven cultural samples in the qualities thought to be important for success in school. The cross-cultural correlations of parents' ratings of the forty-one descriptors indicate general agreement among all seven cultural groups, especially between pairs from the same cultural region (i.e. Italy and Spain; the Netherlands and Sweden) or the same cultural "family" (United States and Australia). Four common factors, defined by core qualities, were attributed to school success/problems in all samples, but the samples varied in the importance that they attributed to these factors, again with evidence of higher agreement among the culturally closer samples. Analysis of parental background and child predictors of ratings showed that some of them contributed to small differences in ratings, but the cultural differences remained highly significant even after controlling for these potential confounds. This is especially true for the Cognitive and Character factors. Further, despite such other sources of variance, moderate to strong within-sample consensus was found for the Dutch, Polish, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, and U.S. samples, leaving only the Australian sample with low consensus. Additional research is needed with larger samples in order to test, through confirmatory factor analysis or other methods, the extent to which the results from this sample can be replicated and generalized more broadly.

Helping children to succeed in school is a near-universal task of parenting, yet cultures vary in what success in school entails and what child qualities are thought to lead to success. While much research has focused on contrasts between Western and non-Western cultures in their conceptualizations of intelligence and learning, this study adds to the existing literature by further differentiating among cultural models that have been subsumed under the "Western" umbrella. The results provide evidence for the internal coherence of cultural models within any given social group, evidence that is supported with convergent results from our other reports. The broad contrast between the U.S. emphasis on cognitive competence and a greater focus on social or emotional competence in non-Western cultures (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004) is mirrored here in a similar contrast between our U.S. sample of parents and the European samples, particularly the Italian and Spanish parents. Our findings also suggest, however, that differences in cultural models of the



successful schoolchild are more complex than the cognitive versus social competence contrast. The Dutch parents' cultural model differs from the American model on yet another dimension—self regulation. Dutch parents seem to place importance on qualities in the Difficult Temperament factor, those that represent behavioral and emotional regulation (or lack thereof). The Swedish parents' ethnotheories of a successful schoolchild also differ from those of the American parents in that Self-actualization figures more prominently than Cognitive Competence. Like the Dutch parents, the Swedish parents apparently valued assertiveness and openness to experience, but unlike the Dutch parents, they did not seem very concerned about their children's temperaments. The Polish results differ from all the other samples in presenting a balance of both traditionally valued qualities such as obedience and respect, in contrast to currently more desired qualities of entrepreneurship—both within the same dominant factor. This pattern may reflect the unique reality of rapid social and economic change in Poland.

The results of this study also suggest subtle yet significant cultural differences about the relative importance of various qualities for children's success in school. Similarities between the two southern European samples (Italy and Spain) are evident in several of our analyses, as are similarities between the two northern European samples (Sweden and the Netherlands), and the two Anglo-heritage cultural groups (the United States and Australia). Yet even within these pairs, there are distinctive patterns of emphasis. For example, in both the Italian and Spanish samples, the Good Character factor was the most important cluster of qualities. The Italian and Spanish parents' cultural models of the successful student both entail being responsible, reliable, and well-behaved; yet the Spanish Good Character factor has almost no overlap with the Italian factor beyond the core items, and it pulls in a variety of qualities (notably cognitive qualities) that are assigned elsewhere in all the other samples.

Understanding parents' ethnotheories about school success may have important implications for children's formal education. First, recognition of divergent cultural models of school success may help increase awareness of multiple pathways to achievement and well-being. Each cultural model presented in the current study points to a different perspective on good practice both at home and at school. Second, identifying cultural models of school success may help educators to understand parental socialization at home to work with parents to coordinate teaching efforts in both contexts. Standardized school curricula may not function equally well for all children, particularly if they are not congruent with parents' cultural models of success and related socialization efforts carried out at home.

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